DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 346 422 CG 024 331

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TITLE Trashcan Kids.
INSTITUTION Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, Va.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-87120-194-1
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 61p.
AVAILABLE FROM Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1250 N. Pitt St., Alexandria, VA 22314 ($9.95, stock No. 611-92132).
PUB TYPE Reports - General (140)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *High Risk Students; High Schools; *High School Students; *Nontraditional Education; *Potential Dropouts; *Self Esteem; *Student Problems; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS *Enterprise High Schools MI

ABSTRACT

This book describes the lives and life conditions of some of the approximately 30 students who attended one Enterprise High School located in northwestern Macomb County (Michigan) designed to keep potential dropouts in school. All of the events described in the book actually happened although they did not actually happen to any one or two specific students. Consequently, the main characters in the story are fictional proxies for the real students they represent. It is suggested that the success of the students in school and in life is a product of certain learning conditions that Enterprise High School evinces: that teachers genuinely care about students; that the curriculum is life-centered and moves from meaningful activities to the composite pieces of learning called lessons; and that staff and students are provided time for and an opportunity to resolve the problems that emerge in the school. By describing activities and events in the lives of the students, both in and out of school, the book explores why certain education programs and school cultures are accepted or rejected by students and identifies the nonschool influences that cause students to either accept defeat early in life or to face the future with confidence and success. The teachers at Enterprise are depicted as going beyond the curriculum to instill positive values and self-esteem in students who need more than academic credits to progress in life. (NB)

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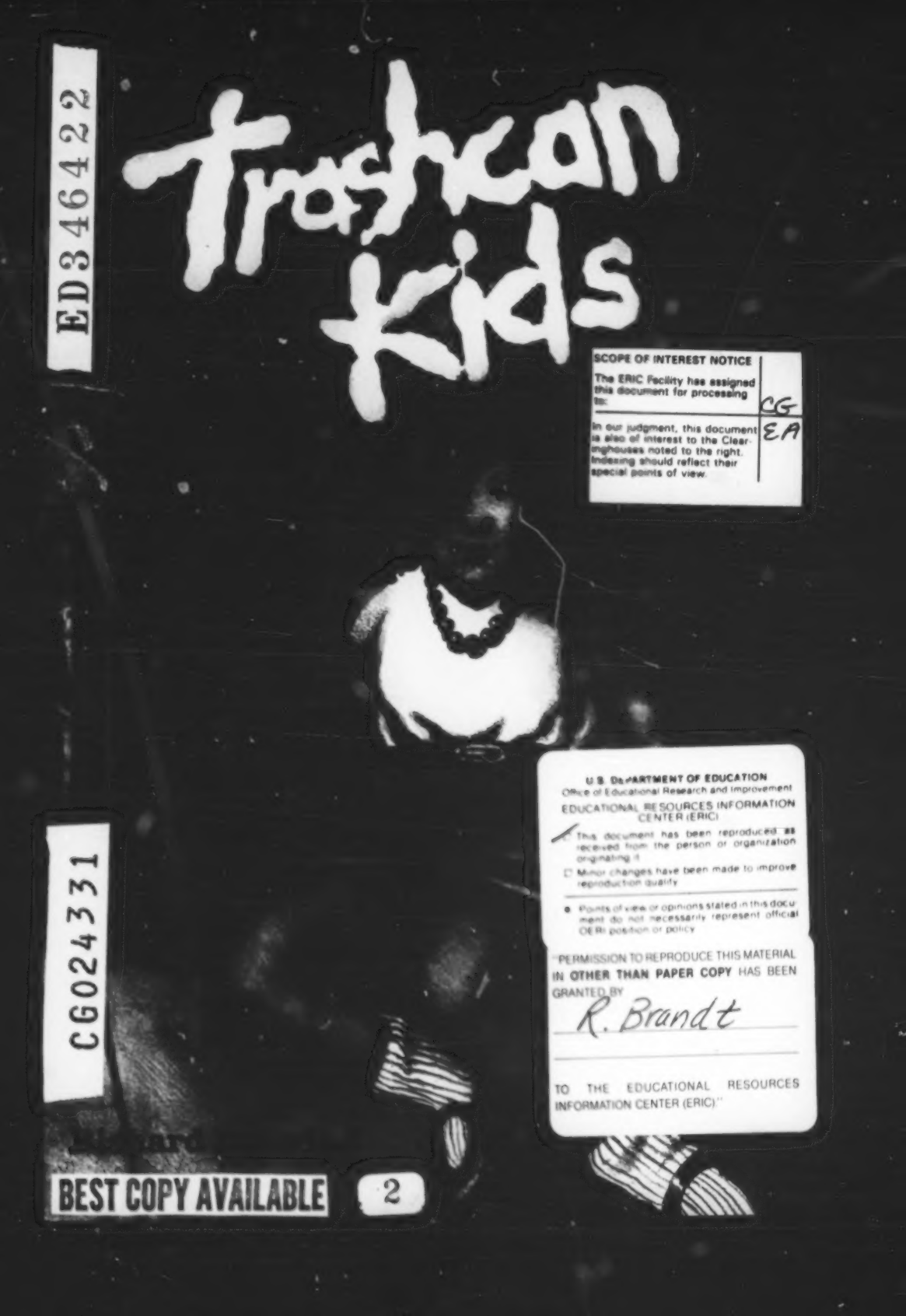

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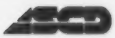

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Printed in the United States of America.

Ronald S. Brandt, *Executive Editor*
Nancy Modrak, *Managing Editor, Books*
Ginger R. Miller, *Associate Editor*
Gary Bloom, *Manager, Design and Production Services*

Cover illustration by Barbara Kiwak

Price: $9.95
ASCD Stock Number: 611-92132
ISBN: 0-87120-194-1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Benedict, Richard Roy.
Trashcan kids / Richard Benedict.
p. cm.
ISBN 0-87120-194-1 : $9.95
1. Socially handicapped children—Education (Secondary)—Michigan—Utica—Case studies. 2. Business education—Michigan—Utica—Case studies. 3. Utica Enterprise High School (Utica, Mich.) I. Title.
LC4093.U87B46 1992
371.96'7'09774'39—dc20 92-19499
CIP

Acknowledgments

There are several people whose first names are mentioned in this story. Among them are Julia Williams, Mary Tweksbury, and Mark Goike. These three are among the nearly 100 people who, at one time or another, brought the Enterprise High School program to life in the many communities in which it was planted. Many others who are not mentioned in this book also contributed greatly to the success of this program. To all of you, I give my lifelong gratitude, and admiration for a job well done.

Other people, such as Dick Snell and Don Miller, were fully named in this book as well. These two were my closest colleagues during the years Enterprise prospered. I am deeply appreciative to both of them for their wisdom, courage, and friendship.

I want to acknowledge that this book is about the hundreds of students—former high school dropouts—who came back to school for another shot at success. I love all of you more than you can know. You are to me uncut diamonds awaiting the redemption of a loving chisel. That I have been involved in this life-affirming process with you is something for which I will be forever grateful.

Lastly, I thank the supportive superintendents who valued this program for what it did for students and kept it going even when it "cost" their districts money. Thomas Dobbs of Warren Woods Schools and George Harrison of Romeo Schools are two of these special educators.

Dedication

To my great teacher, Cecil Williams, and to my wife, Catherine, who helped bring the trashcan kid in me to life.

Preface

Enterprise High School was born in 1979 in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The federal government provided "Experimental and Demonstration" monies for this alternative education program. Those funds were awarded through a competitive process. This money came from the Title IV C of the United States Education Act, which was in force at the time.

At Enterprise High, students spend one-half of their school day operating businesses that they own, and from which they profit. The grist from most of these classes is the reading, writing, listening, speaking, problem-solving, and teamwork requirements associated with successfully operating businesses and learning to manage an independent life.

This program was designed to keep potential dropouts in school. It did that well. Of the twenty-five students who enrolled in 1979, twenty-three were still in school in 1981. Of the thirty-six similar students who stayed in the regular high school, only six were still in school two years later. Based on that outcome, and significant gains in students' self-esteem and academic achievement, the program was officially labeled a "Promising Educational Practice." The State of Michigan encouraged other school districts to "adopt" the program.

Dick Snell, an educational consultant in Macomb County, Michigan, which is immediately north of Detroit, helped school districts in Macomb develop an appetite for this program. Instead of serving potential dropouts in Macomb, however, the program served students who had already left high school. Snell and I became co-directors of Enterprise High programs in Macomb. In 1985—the period in which the trashcan kids were created—there were twelve Enterprise High School campuses in seven counties in Michigan. Each campus typically enrolled fifty students, employed an academic facilitator, three vocational professionals or paraprofessionals (from the occupations in which students were enterprising), and a coordinator who acted as the program leader.

The Enterprise High School campus described in this book was located in northwestern Macomb County. It was officially known as Utica Enterprise High School. It was a smaller campus than most, enrolling about thirty students, employing one academic facilitator who doubled as program coordinator, and two vocational professionals.

All of the events described in this book actually happened

though they did not actually happen to any one or two specific students. Therefore, the main characters in this story are fictional proxies for the real students they represent.

The purpose of this book is to describe the lives and life conditions of the students who went to Enterprise High School. I believe that their success in school and life is a product of certain learning conditions that Enterprise High School evinces—namely, that teachers genuinely care about students; that the curriculum is life-centered and moves from meaningful activities to the composite pieces of learning we call lessons; and that staff and students are provided time for and an opportunity to resolve the problems that emerge in the school.

My hope is that others who work with youngsters may learn from this story; that the lives of those who find school intolerable might be improved because this book provides for educators some understanding of what schools must do to become important parts of the lives of young people.

Trashcan Kids

Getting her to look just right was a labor of love.

The limits of her long legs were defined by the cheap nylons into which they were fitted. On each ear she wore an earring . . . a different earring. From her left ear hung a giant hoop with dangles of sterling silver and colorful wooden balls clinking at the bottom. On her right ear she wore a fake diamond post. Around her neck was a braid of cheap necklaces, and a red bandanna tied at the side guided the viewer's eye to her left shoulder. Over her otherwise bare torso she wore the T-shirt of the season. It was 1986, and the group R.E.O. Speedwagon was hot. So was she. So she wore a black R.E.O. Speedwagon T-shirt tucked tightly into her short, "but not obscene," blue jean skirt. She was looking good!

Her hair wasn't quite right, though. There hadn't been any argument about its color: It had to be red, just like her fiery spirit. She wasn't tame and she wasn't wild, but she *was* hot, and it was necessary that everyone know that just by looking at her. So, the choice about hair color was easy. How to style it was the first point of contention.

"Over one eye," declared Eric, as if his judgment were the one that mattered.

"Pulled back in a ponytail, off to one side," offered Chelsea, as if the decision were still in the process of being made.

"Pigtails!" added Rocky, as if inspired by the gods. The remaining foursome looked at him with disdain. They needed no words to clarify their disapproval.

"Definitely over one eye," agreed Marsha, her own hairstyle resembling the one that Eric had in mind when he offered his opinion.

"Over one eye it is," declared Chris, who began to sculpt the random mounds of red hair into swirling waves. In a moment, they all stood back and examined their creation.

Words were not necessary. They all looked at Clarissa as if she were a young woman they had raised since childhood. There she was on the edge of the table, long legs crossed, blue eyes heavily made up, red hair styled, and dressed to look too hot to handle. They all nodded their heads in approval without looking at each other to see if that approval was shared. They were in total agreement.

Clarissa not only looked fantastic, she WAS fantastic. When Eric slid an unlit cigarette between the first two fingers of her right hand, and stuffed the remaining pack of Marlboro Reds under the sleeve of her left shoulder, the others expressed their approval of his genius. Now she was ready. For what, no one was certain . . . but she was ready.

"Break's over, guys," announced Julia in a pleasant, almost melodic voice. "Oh, fantastic," she said when she saw Clarissa sitting there "finished." "I've got to get my camera," she said as she pulled herself back out of the break room toward her classroom. She hurried up the hall to the artistically disheveled space affectionately called "Julia's room." A project of one kind or another was on each table. Here, a ceramic eagle in the afterglow of its first baking, ready for the glazes that would complete it. Over there a piece of glass onto which a student was drawing a picture of a leopard in ink. In the corner, piles of cotton, nylon stockings, eyes, and other supplies used by the students to make nylon stuffed dolls. The dolls were selling more quickly than the students could make them.

Julia grabbed her camera and scooted back down the hall as if Clarissa, the life-sized stuffed nylon stocking doll the students had crafted during a series of breaks, might disappear before she had a chance to capture her on film. She reentered the break room, where a small crowd had gathered.

"Stand around her, guys," Julia directed Clarissa's creators, five of the eight morning "enrollees." Without consciously assigning themselves attendance patterns, five of the eight students

assigned to the Morning Arts Enterprise section managed to show up each day, but never the same five. This morning's group — Eric, Chelsea, Rocky, Marsha, and Chris — were the bedrock of the A.M. Arts Enterprise.

The five creators stood behind Clarissa. A couple of students from the other enterprise area in this school—woodworking enterprises—slid behind Clarissa, next to the Art Five.

"Get outta there," commanded Julia in a jocular but firm tone. There was no quarrel intended and none expected. The others drew back, out of the camera frame, and watched the scene with stifled admiration.

Julia snapped off a couple of shots. Rocky sat next to Clarissa and reached a hand up and cupped one of her breasts. Chelsea and Marsha quickly came to Clarissa's aid, attacking Rocky from both sides. Chelsea slapped his hand while Marsha pushed him away from the defenseless Clarissa—who was not a plaything to be fondled by boys.

Julia's voice and posture changed. "There will be none of that!" she ordered. Rocky's intended joke divided the room along gender lines, the boys howling while the girls complained. But the joke was not repeated and the students returned to their respective classes for the second half of the morning.

Almost as an afterthought, Marsha went back into the break room and picked up Clarissa. She carefully carried her to the art room where she would be safe from the hands of anyone who might abuse her and think it was funny.

Clarissa was created by students at the Utica Enterprise High School, a different kind of school for kids who found regular school unbearable and unmanageable. Enterprise High was based on a fairly simple and very American idea: If you can't stand working for someone else, then work for yourself. Start your own business. Be your own boss. That's what you can do at Enterprise High School—start your own business and be your own boss.

For half of the school day students enterprised. They built products in woodshop, created art in art studios, and prepared food in the school kitchen—all of which they sold to the general public. Those enterprise "areas"—woods, arts, and foods—were the

most common endeavors among the Enterprise schools that were established during the 1980s in the metropolitan Detroit area. Students also experimented in other enterprises: computer services, computer repair, metals, performing arts, printing, and automotive repair.

Sometimes students worked together in teams. Sometimes they worked alone. Sometimes they didn't work at all. Often they worked like crazy. Always the consequences of their actions were directly linked to choices they made: If they chose to work hard they earned a large dividend; if they chose to work smart they earned a larger dividend; and if they chose not to work at all they simply earned no dividend.

The other half of the day was a little bit like regular school. The stuff of classtime was associated with the trials of living and enterprising. The "academics" teacher (who had half of the students in the morning and the other half in the afternoon) and the two enterprise teachers (who shared the students when they weren't in academics) took Fridays to meet together and develop academic activities that were linked to what the students were actually doing in their enterprises; like problem solving production problems, calculating the cost of a product, setting a selling price for a product, determining each team member's share of product revenue, developing a marketing campaign, resolving the inevitable human relations problems associated with working together, accounting for materials used or supplies on hand, and determining their expected dividend for the two-week period and checking to see if it matched the calculations of the teachers in charge.

Julia (arts facilitator), Mark (woods facilitator), and Mary (academics facilitator and program coordinator) first discussed Clarissa during a coordination meeting the Friday afternoon in January after she was created.

"Can you believe what they did?" asked Julia in a tone more boasting than questioning.

"Who thought of that?" asked Mary. "And what are they going to do with her?"

The last question was genuine. Usually, when a product was made, it was with a purpose in mind. Either a customer had ordered it (like the seemingly thousand stuffed nylon stocking dolls that had been ordered, manufactured, and delivered during the Christmas season and the small wooden cradles that the woods

students were building to complement the dolls) or it was to be given to a loved one, usually Mom.

This particular creation was a spontaneous burst of creativity. Opportunity met preparation. Where cotton stuffing, nylon stockings, and students on break met, there soon was a body and a wardrobe brought in by the students. "She" quickly became the property of those who had started working on her. They nurtured her and dressed her and gave her the beginning of an identity.

"I don't know what's to become of her," answered Julia thoughtfully. She paused and thought for a moment. Her eyes were looking far off somewhere as she unconsciously chewed the left corner of her lower lip. "I think I'm just going to let them fool around with this awhile and see where it goes."

I first heard about Clarissa on a routine visit to the Utica Enterprise High School. I had started the first Enterprise High School in Kalamazoo County, Michigan, in 1979. Three events precipitated its leap to Macomb County, Michigan. The first was the end of the experimental money I'd been granted to start this kind of school as part of a dropout prevention plan. The school's success at keeping twenty-three of the twenty-five 8th and 9th grade students who enrolled during the first school year is even more impressive when compared to the fact that only six of a control group of thirty-six students in the regular high school were still enrolled two years later.

But that first school depended on experimental money to operate—money that wasn't available for more than three years. I learned of our demise when the high school principal drove by me in the parking lot and paused long enough to say, "If there isn't any funding for your program next year, you'll be teaching math or something at the high school." It was kind of like having your doctor pass you in the grocery store and say, "Your last tests were suspicious. If it's cancer, we can start chemotherapy soon." But he meant well. Conflict was as unpleasant for him as it is for the rest of us. He didn't fail to be sensitive to my shock, he simply wanted to avoid watching me feel it.

With funding in doubt, the second ingredient for change, Dick Snell, Macomb County's educational consultant, entered the scene.

Never has God put on this earth a more electric person than Dick Snell. At age 52 he could run a marathon in under three hours and have enough energy left over to make mad, passionate love to his wife.

Dick was a wheeler-dealer. He visited the program in Kalamazoo County and loved it. "We have to get you over to Macomb County," he said during his second visit. I thought he was just being polite. In reality, he was simply stating his agenda.

In the late spring of 1980 I called Dick. I had just visited Patrick Babcock, then director of the Michigan Department of Labor, and challenged him to let Enterprise High be an alternative to the give-away summer jobs program that had fifteen kids leaning on one lawn mower in the park, each earning the minimum hourly wage. "Let them earn what they earn," I offered. He was leaving the department to become the head of Mental Health but he gave us $30,000 to run a summer program. I was ecstatic. My principal was angry.

"If he wanted to run a summer program in this school district, he should have been in my office talking with me, not in Lansing talking with you." I was like that—often running with an idea to see where it would go, forgetting to bring important people along with me.

That error in protocol is the reason I called Dick and told him that I had $30,000 for a summer program and no place to run it, and asked if he could find a school district in Macomb County that wanted the money. Two hours later he had a school district and a youth employment agency ready to adopt this waif of a program. He asked if I would train the staff for $200 a day for 5 days. That was more than double my teaching salary. I quickly accepted.

For three years I coordinated and taught classes in the Enterprise High School in Kalamazoo. For three summers I helped Dick run summer programs in Macomb. In the spring of 1982 I completed my doctorate and learned that cuts in federal spending jeopardized the program in Kalamazoo. Late that summer, Dick asked me to help him create a year-round program in Macomb. I took a gamble that what was born in Kalamazoo could be transplanted and would flourish in Macomb County.

By the fall of 1982 I was working in Macomb County for the Macomb County Educational Services Center. Dick spread the Enterprise gospel everywhere he went. He tried to convince superintendents, vocational directors, adult education directors, and everyone he contacted that they needed to have a school like this in their district. By 1985 we had about a dozen full-fledged

Enterprise High Schools in three counties in Michigan.

Dick was into sales, I was into service. Each new program challenged my ability to replicate the model. When I was "in" an Enterprise High, I was the teacher, counselor, and coordinator. When I jumped up a level, I taught others to play those roles. Often I found that it was the people themselves, not what I could teach them, that made it possible to replicate Enterprise High and the philosophy upon which it was based. I was not in charge of hiring the staff that ran the programs. That was up to the local school districts that "adopted" the program. It was once the staff was hired that my job as trainer began.

The staff members at the twelve Enterprise High Schools were democratically organized and had a say in their schedules, policies, and practices. Staff members from the first Macomb County Enterprise High Schools agreed that they needed more staff and program development time together—enough time to get together and solve the problems they faced. For this reason, the staffs voted to cover their twenty-five student contact hours in four days, and save Fridays for team problem solving and staff development.

On the Friday after Clarissa was created, when I dropped in for my regularly scheduled visit with the Utica team, Julia could hardly wait to show her off. Julia grabbed me by the arm and dragged me to the showroom. There, sitting on a chair, with her legs now about five feet long, was Clarissa. I approached her as one would approach a newly discovered life form. I tiptoed up to her and touched her shoulder. I was most taken by her appearance. She WAS one of our students. They had dressed her as they dressed, they had posed her as they posed. They had created her in their own collective image.

"My Gawd, is she ugly," I pronounced, half jokingly. "Look at those legs!"

"Now, now," Julia chided. "She used to have legs of normal length, but the students have been dancing with her and her legs have stretched."

"They're not supposed to step on her feet when they dance with her," I joked. I stepped back a moment and gazed at this red-headed, life-sized (and more) doll. I considered what it meant that they were now "dancing" with her. I appreciated how much their admiration for her seemed a healthy thing.

"She's fantastic," I finally confirmed. "I love her T-shirt and clothing. She looks exactly like the students."

"I know," Julia replied with pride in her voice. "I absolutely love this. This was not an assignment or a job or anything. They

just started fooling around at break and here she is. Then they named her."

"Are you doing anything with her in academics?" I asked.

"We were just talking about that when you came in," Julia responded.

Julia and I joined the others and considered the problems of the week. Clarissa was what Dick called "a high-class problem"—the kind of problem that was pleasant to have. The group agreed that Clarissa needed repair and a relationship with the program that would give her a legitimacy she was now missing.

"The students have talked about giving her a brother, or sister, or boyfriend, or something," said Julia.

"Fantastic! Let them do it," I encouraged.

"But how will that relate to Enterprise?" Mary asked thoughtfully. "It can't just be 'and now we make this one for fun and that one for fun.' Their enterprise time should be spent enterprising."

Mary paused for a moment as if she were trying to catch a butterfly of an idea that was winging its way through her mind. "I know," she continued, "Let's get them to write the fantasies they have about her life."

"Terrific idea!" added Julia.

Mark nodded his head in agreement, but appeared to feel a bit left out of the fun. As if she had intuited Mark's feelings, Julia suggested a role for Mark and his students. "Clarissa's legs and body are going to continue to stretch beyond recognition unless we figure out a way to give her some internal strength," she said, looking at Mark, who quickly picked up on the opportunity.

"Like a skeleton or something?" he responded, as if to check his understanding of her concern.

"Or something. . ." Julia trailed. "Maybe this is another problem the students can give us some help solving. Let's just ask them to repair Clarissa and keep her from stretching and then see what they come up with." Mark liked the idea.

Whenever possible, we took problems back to the students for their consideration. Not only did they often have some remarkably creative ideas, generating solutions helped them feel invested in working toward bringing the solution to fruition. The solutions were often imperfect. But being involved in the problem-solving process helped the students understand why the "perfect" solution could not always be achieved, and helped them accept living with imperfection—a necessary life skill in this imperfect world.

Like Julia's art classes, Mark's two woodshop classes each had eight students enrolled, with five usually showing up each ses-

sion. The groups had just finished the very busy Christmas season and had joined the rest of the national economy in the post-Christmas economic slowdown. The period from January to March was a tough time to enterprise. Thus, Clarissa's arrival was well-timed as the school spontaneously developed an interest in this life-sized doll.

Before the Friday staff meeting ended, the staff had agreed, among other things, to have the students write about the life of Clarissa, to have the woodshop students work on the problem of the doll's internal strength, and to have the art students figure out how they could market Clarissa. We also agreed that the ideas generated by the students were apt to be entertaining (at best) or disgusting (at worst). Only time would tell.

Marsha opened one eye and checked to see if the walls of the room were still moving like living waves of striated muscle, undulating from the ceiling toward the floor. The mescaline she had swallowed the night before badly affected her.

She had been partying with a friend whose 40-year-old boyfriend handed out drugs as if they were candy. His material wealth (a large condo complete with a hot tub, an impressive car, and more) and his penchant for young girls sickened me with the possibilities. I had alerted the police of his name and his antics. They claimed to be aware of him already, but he was still out there, giving drugs to young girls at parties, never getting busted.

After Marsha took the mescaline early Saturday evening the world took on a kind of nightmarish ambience and all she wanted was to "come down." She went home early, hoping that being around her family would help her come down. It only further loosened her tentative grip on reality.

Finally, just before midnight, she called her buddy Chris. "You've got to help me!" she demanded. Chris got her some downers and convinced her that a good night's sleep would make the nightmare go away. The last thing she remembered was watching the walls wiggle in parallel lines as she drifted fitfully to sleep.

The first thing she felt the next morning was relief. The walls weren't wiggling! She had been given another chance at sanity. But her joy quickly vanished when she heard her father's roaring.

"Get me another beer!" her father bellowed at her stepmother.

"Get it yourself," she sneered. Sunday morning and already the antagonisms had begun. Marsha knew the rest of the scene without waiting to see it played out. It was as if her dad had said, "Hey, you wanna fight?" and his wife had answered, "Yeah, sure, I'll fight ya." But this way he could claim she wasn't taking care of him, and she could claim he shouldn't be drinking before noon on Sunday and they could each feel more justified in their fighting than if they had just decided to fight for no special reason.

Marsha split. Maybe that was why her real mother had split ten years earlier. Maybe the fighting was an addiction that her father couldn't live without. Maybe there was no way to stop the fighting. Maybe her mom just got sick of it and left. But Marsha still didn't understand why her mother hadn't taken her when she left.

Chris was a good friend. Not a boyfriend. They had agreed, without ever talking about it, that they each needed a friend of the opposite sex to help them sort out the world. There would be no boyfriend and girlfriend stuff in this relationship. That way they could talk about other boys and girls with one another, and gain an insider's view into the way the two sexes thought.

"You okay?" Chris asked as he answered the door. His mom was at church. She had long since given up trying to make Chris go. "God doesn't care if I go to church!" he'd insist. Not knowing where in the Bible it said for sure that you had to go to church every Sunday, his mom didn't go to the wall for that one. Sometimes she wondered if she should have. She never gave up praying that one day he'd find the love for God in his heart and WANT to go to church.

"Yeah, thanks," answered Marsha, in a flat tone. "I thought I was never going to come down."

Marsha did not consider herself a druggie. She used drugs occasionally—more often than some of her friends, less than others. The drugs had been wonderful at first. She could honestly say that some of the happiest times in her life had been when she was high. But the feeling kept getting harder to achieve; it was like trying to recapture the buzz from that first cup of coffee during the morning with the rest of the cups during the day. Marsha simply was not able to get to those mellow high places anymore with any regularity or certainty.

That was why she had tried mescaline the night before. She'd heard it was good—stronger than marijuana but weaker than acid. It was a trip she never wanted to take again.

"Yeah, you seemed pretty bad off. Want some coffee?"

"Sure," Marsha answered, in a "what have I got to lose?" sort of way.

Chris poured Marsha a cup of coffee from the pot that his mother had brewed earlier in the day. It was a little scalded by now, but with three sugars and a lot of milk, Marsha didn't notice.

"What are you going to do today?" she asked.

"Before or after my polo match?" Chris answered sarcastically.

"After, asshole," she responded in kind.

"Jack wants me to help him put a new muffler on his car. That should take me until two or three. Then I was just going to hang out at Metz's."

Metz's was a grocery store across the street from the entrance to Riverview Park. Everyone hung out in the parking lot. At least everyone like Marsha and her kind. You didn't see any "Polo" shirts or "jocks" at Metz's; but you saw lots of bikers and R.E.O. Speedwagon T-shirts.

Jack was Marsha's true love. He and Marsha went out for about five months during the last school year, when she was sixteen. He was the first and only boy she had ever "made it" with. He said they'd be married some day, so why not? She wanted more than anything else in the world to be married to Jack, and thought that "doing it" would help cement their relationship. She was wrong.

After two or three months of sneaking around and doing it any time and anywhere they could (especially at his mother's house during the day when no one was home and they should have been in school), she got pregnant. She miscarried spontaneously two months later, but Jack had already told her he wasn't going to marry her. Not that he didn't want to, mind you. He just thought they were both too young. "Too young to get married but not too young to play married!" she screamed at Jack when he shared with her his new-found wisdom.

He decided that they should date around. She decided he was a gigantic jerk—but she couldn't stop loving him. She still believed that he would come to his senses one day and ask her to marry him. If he ever did, she wouldn't hesitate for a second to say yes.

In the meantime, their affair caused her to miss more school than she could make up and she lost all of her credits. School seemed so pointless to her, anyway, so she took the rest of her sophomore year off. When she went back to school in the fall of what should have been her junior year, she didn't want to repeat all her 10th grade classes. Some of her friends had gone to

Enterprise High and said it was pretty cool, so she checked it out. A week later, she was going to school at this totally unbelievable place where she could smoke, spend half a day in art class, and spend the other half of the day doing stuff in school that made some sense.

"How about you? What are you up to?" Chris offered in kind.

"Nothing much, I guess. I just want to stay away from the house. Bruce and Joyce are destined to go a few rounds today, and I don't want to be there until all the blood's been cleaned up and the making up has started."

Marsha barely remembered her real mom. She was six when her mother split. She woke up one morning and her mom was gone. No letter, no address, no phone number, nothing. She could remember the smell of her, though, and every once in a while that smell would drift into her brain and trigger a rush of emotions that was to homesickness what appendicitis is to a stomach ache. She missed her mother so badly, it was as if she had two lives. One before her mother left and one after.

When she got frightened or felt lonely as a child, she would talk to her mother the way some people pray to God. Those talks had never seemed to really help, though, so over the years she had stopped.

"Come to Jack's with me and hang out while we work on the car," Chris suggested. He thought Marsha was a great catch, if a bit overweight. Actually, he thought she was the greatest girl he knew but he knew she wasn't interested in him "that way." Actually, he wondered if any woman would ever be interested in him "that way." She was interested in Jack and he thought he should do what he could to get the two of them back together.

"No. That jerk will probably talk about some other girl and I'll be shipwrecked for a week. No, I'll be okay. I'll go to Jennie's or Robin's." She paused for a second and then went on, "Actually, Julia invited me to her farm. I might go out there."

She had just remembered the invitation. It made her spirit lighter. Why? She had no idea. She only knew that she wanted to go to Julia's, had to go to Julia's, and that she wanted to get there fast.

"Write about Clarissa's life," Mary instructed the twelve students who were in her A.M. Academics class on Monday morning.

"Can we write ANYTHING we want?" came the ceremonial question from the back of the room.

"Yes. You may write ANYTHING you want. However, you will only get credit for serious writing. Nothing pornographic. Nothing glorifying drug use or Satan worship. Other than that, hey, you're free. . . ."

"Some freedom!" objected the one who played the high priest of anarchy this morning.

"Shut up, asshole," came an unasked-for vote of no confidence.

"No put-downs," reminded Mary.

The others had already begun writing in their journals. Some talked with one another, collaborating on the possibilities of the emerging history of Clarissa, laughing and jotting down their ideas.

This assignment sparked their interest and would permit them to postpone their "total freedom" arguments for another assignment—such as writing for the school newspaper (a forum they used for advertising their products) or for the *Dream Weaver*, a creative writing magazine published by the combined Enterprise schools.

Mary was pleased that the assignment was so well received. That was not always the case. Sometimes a weekend's preparation was met with the painful verdict, "This sucks," or the equally painful question, "Do we HAVE to do this shit?" This time, the students had apparently decided the assignment was worth doing without Mary having to explain why.

She often had to force herself to avoid reacting to their words. She had learned from experience that reacting to their words was like letting the disruptive student control the flow of the class.

It was predictable. She could say, "Don't talk like that," or make some other more profound effort to repress the inappropriate language. A "make me" kind of reaction—spoken or unspoken, passive or active—typically ensued. The antagonisms that followed were contagious, and the spread of emotions brought out the worst in all of them. Two points for the stifling of learning.

Mary had found two strategies useful in dealing with stu-

dents' destructive comments and behaviors. The first was to be "self-disclosing"—telling the students, in a noncondemning way, how their behavior was affecting her. She would say something like, "When you say this sucks, after I've spent all weekend preparing this lesson, I feel like a real failure. I want you to like school and get something from these lessons. I would like you to do the lesson. If, after it's completed, you have some ideas that could make it more interesting or relevant the next time, I'd love to hear those. However, it feels very unfair and unloving for you to condemn this before you've even given it a try!"

The other strategy was to temporarily ignore the misbehavior. Mary found that if she kept herself from reacting emotionally to the barbs that were sent by those trying to disrupt the lesson, the other students' reactions would often be sufficiently corrective. That was the case in this instance. That was a good sign that this project was going to be successful.

"Marsha came over to my house yesterday," Julia confided to Mary after the students had gone for the day. "I'm worried about her."

Mary took in Julia's expressions, words, and body language, and chose not to respond right away.

"Her eyes were so sunken and her body so limp I wondered if she had been abused or something over the weekend."

"Did you ask her?" questioned Mary.

"Not directly. I just told her how glad I was that she took me up on my offer to come visit the farm and asked her if she was feeling okay. She said yes, and I left it at that."

"What did you guys do?" Mary asked.

"Just what we usually do on Sunday on a farm in January. We baked."

"Sounds like fun. How is Marsha in the kitchen?"

"Hysterical. You can tell she hasn't done much baking. She was a sport, though, and pitched in the best she could. Mostly, she just seemed to be soaking in the family. We were all together laughing and talking and baking, and it was just kind of nice. When I took her to the barn to show her the horses and cows and goats, she opened up to me a little bit. Said she'd had a bad trip

the night before but was okay. She said it wasn't LSD so there wouldn't be any flashbacks, but she was really shaken."

"Good. Maybe that will keep her from going down that road any further."

"I don't know," Julia said thoughtfully. "I think whatever road she goes down it's kind of make-believe right now anyway."

"How do you mean?" asked Mary.

"She kept asking how old I was when I fell in love the first time, got married, had Stacy, et cetera. I asked her if she was in love and she said she was, but the jerk didn't deserve her. Said she'd marry him if she had half a chance. I felt like saying, 'If he doesn't deserve you now, he won't deserve you later. Find someone who does deserve you and choose to love him.'"

"The proverbial 'Do I love the one I'm attracted to, or do I love the one who's good for me?' dilemma," responded Mary. "By the time you're old enough to know that's a false dilemma, it's usually too late."

"I know," answered Julia in genuine agreement. "We raise these girls to think their happiness depends on them being loved by Mr. Right. No wonder they get it wrong so often. When will we start raising them to know that they have to be loved by themselves first? Then they'll pick one and not be destroyed if it turns out to be a wrong choice."

"When will salmon quit swimming upstream only to lay their eggs and die?" asked Mary philosophically, as if there were no hope for girls in this culture.

"We can help," responded Julia in her eternally optimistic way. "We can love them for the right things and teach them to love themselves for those same things."

"You're right," Mary agreed affectionately. She leaned across the table and embraced Julia. "You're wonderful," she affirmed.

"You too, Mary."

"That's what Marsha wanted yesterday," recognized Julia spontaneously. "Just a hug and a good dose of country lovin'."

"And that's what she got, I'll bet," remarked Mary supportively.

"You bet," Julia responded happily, realizing she'd done it right without even being aware of what "it" was. "She got lots of hugs and muffins. What more could a body want?"

The words of Leonard Cohen's song "Suzanne" rolled through Mary's mind: "They are leaning out for love, and they will lean that way forever. . . ."

"Indeed," Mary answered. "Indeed."

"Rick, I just had to call you and tell you what's been going on here," Julia announced into the telephone. "I'm so glad I found you in the office."

My office was in the Macomb County Educational Service Center building. Because there were twelve schools in three counties, and because I was usually out visiting one of them, I was hard to reach. It was a bit of a joke among the staff members that if they didn't see me regularly themselves, they could speculate that I was never anywhere. But Julia had reached me on this call. After a few moments of ritualistic courtesies she went on. . . .

"They've started making a family!" she effused. "Can you believe it?"

"That's fantastic!" I responded, genuinely sharing her exuberance. I had long ago recognized that the successful Enterprise High Schools were the ones in which staff members were able to create a family feeling within the school. This creation of a family of dolls within the family of the school seemed almost like the students' way of recreating that process. It was as if this new family of dolls was making Mary, Julia, and Mark grandparents; and me, a great-grandparent. I didn't know where it was headed, but it felt very good.

"They gave Clarissa a brother, Billy. And they have this great family story that's unfolding. It's fabulous."

"I'll come over for a visit," I offered, wanting to be near this excitement.

"Not yet," responded Julia apologetically. "There's really not much else to see, yet. These are just ideas the students have come up with and are working on. Can you come, say, a week from Friday?"

With twelve schools in three counties and only one Friday per week, I could only make three or four Friday visits to each school per year. Those visits were important because on those days I got a chance to learn about and understand the problems and personalities of the different staffs and programs. But this was too important an invitation to pass up. I would work it out.

"You bet," I confirmed. "I'll see you a week from Friday."

Chris was seventeen going on thirty. He was in a hurry to be grown up and in the man's shoes he felt entitled to fill. Everything was an argument with him. "Leave me alone!" he'd shout at his beleaguered mother. "Just let me live my own life."

Of course, the bait was too tempting to pass. She'd respond predictably and justifiably, "As long as you're under my roof, you will do as I say!" He never did, though. He wasn't a terrible kid, but he hadn't been doing as she said for about fifteen years now, and the worst thing he'd had to suffer was her occasional tantrums. He did as he pleased, more or less, and it pleased him less and less to do as she expected.

Traditional high school ended more with a bang than a whimper for Chris. "Well, this teacher kind of pushed me, so I pushed him back. So, I kind of got kicked out of school," he explained on his initial visit to Enterprise High. A phone call to that school confirmed that this was Chris's first act of violence toward a teacher, but it was the proverbial last straw.

"He's not a bad kid," explained the assistant principal in charge of discipline. "He's just completely unmotivated and failing every subject. I suggested that this suspension for assaulting a teacher needn't require his return to school. He's sixteen now, so why keep him coming to a place where he's totally failing?"

So Chris began his career at Enterprise High as a bit of a folk hero. That he had "kicked a teacher's ass" was the accepted rumor. Chris, of course, did nothing to quash the rumor. It gave him an aura of badness he couldn't achieve through looks alone. He was chunky, not particularly well-muscled, and had a bit of a baby face. His desired macho image needed this story for support.

"Maybe I should get out from under this roof, then!" he shouted back at his mom during one particularly nasty argument about eating correctly, brushing his teeth, and showering. She was stunned a bit, but when she thought it through, she called his bluff. "You couldn't survive on your own!" she blurted out with uncharacteristic enmity.

His bruised ego couldn't stand another blow. "Oh yeah? Watch me," he responded. And he left.

Chris moved out the same Sunday night that Marsha visited him before going to Julia's farm. He lived with friends for about

three weeks before learning that he could get welfare benefits if his mother would "emancipate" him. He talked her into it by arguing that if he did something wrong she'd be liable unless he was emancipated.

Aside from concerns about her own liability, Chris's mother worried most about his welfare, and signing the papers from the DSS—Department of Social Services—lifted some of the burden. The state would give him money now and a place to live. At least part of her prayer had been answered. "God, take care of this boy," she'd think. "He doesn't deserve it, but none of us deserves good things. It is only by your grace that good is in the world. Please shower him with your grace."

God's grace was not abundantly obvious at the Heritage Hotel, a place sanctioned by DSS to receive third-party payments for its welfare guests. Chris got a room there, shared a toilet and bath with the other second floor tenants, and got nearly $200 a month for board as long as he went to school and completed his high school diploma.

It didn't matter that Chris was already in school. The deal was "room and board as long as. . . ." So why did Chris's school attendance worsen after he got on welfare and moved into the Heritage Hotel? And why did the welfare payments not stop?

We didn't learn why until we heard about his death. It had a heroic quality about it.

Mary got a call from Chris's social worker early one morning. "Did you hear about Chris?" he asked. Mary could tell by his tone that this was not going to be good news. "He died last night in a fire."

"Oh, God, NO!" she fairly screamed into the phone. "Where? How?"

"I guess he found himself a girlfriend who had an apartment on Means Street. He was working on the sly in a party store, supplementing his welfare benefits with cash wages. He'd get off work at midnight and slide by his girlfriend's place." Mary was beginning to understand why regular school attendance was a thing of the past.

"She had two children already, but was unmarried. He met her at the office here.

"When he got to the apartment last night it must have been on fire. He apparently ran upstairs and woke up the mother, who ran outside. He got one baby and figured she'd gotten the other one. When he got outside she was hysterical and asking about her other baby. He went back up to save the other baby, I guess.

Neither one of them made it. He wasn't burned all that bad. The fumes must have overcome him and he passed out. Died of suffocation. Sorry to be the one to break the news."

She hung up without saying much more than "goodbye." How was she going to break this news to Julia, Mark, and the rest of the school? Without thinking about it much, as if she were afraid she wouldn't be able to do it, she marched across the hall to Julia's room. Without saying a word she grabbed Julia by the arm and implored her to step into the hall. They scurried out of the room to the woodshop where they found Mark.

Mary marched up to him, holding tightly to Julia's hand. She grabbed Mark by the other hand, let go of Julia long enough to hit the "kill" switch that stopped all power to any outlets and equipment in the shop, reattached herself to Julia's arm and marched the two of them into the hallway and out the front doors of the school.

The students were understandably curious. They followed their teachers out of the classrooms and down the hall and watched them through the glass surrounding the front doors.

"What are they doing?" asked one student who couldn't get a view out the window.

"Hugging each other and crying," one student with a view announced. "Crying hard!"

"Jesus, it must be bad," one of them said. "Who died?"

Mark, Julia, and Mary agreed that a school meeting was needed. As soon as they had composed themselves they called their students together in the academics room. They avoided answering all questions until everyone was in the room.

"Chris has died in a fire trying to save the life of his girlfriend's baby," announced Julia, her voice quivering with grief. "He is a hero. We don't know yet when the funeral will be held, or where it will be. We will tell you tomorrow."

Mark added, "There is no point in trying to have a regular school day today. Hang out if you want, 'cause that's what we're going to do. But if you want to, you can go home."

Secretly, the three hoped no one would go home. At this particular time, there was nothing more important in their common lives than spending time together, grieving. What could be taught? What would be learned? At that moment, the most important and obvious lessons were the ones about human compassion and solidarity existing side-by-side with, and softening the awfulness of, human tragedy. They weren't disappointed. Almost all of the students stayed.

Of those who remained, Marsha was the most visibly upset. Chris was dead? Impossible. Impossible.

They all mentioned things about Chris that they thought were very special that they would hold on to. But each was also thinking, "What could I have done . . . ?" Each came up with the same answer, an answer that was almost more painful than one that implied culpability . . . "Nothing."

I was embarrassed that I didn't learn about Chris's death until after the funeral. "It's okay," Julia offered. "We know you have a lot of programs to cover and you can't know everything about every one of them. Besides," she thought she was consoling me, "you didn't know Chris all that well, anyway."

My private thoughts went back to Benton Harbor, Michigan, to an earlier teaching and coaching job. I remembered Louis' death. I didn't know him well, either. His death, too, had a heroic facet to it. His enraged father pointed a shotgun at his mother. Louis stepped between the gun and his mother. "Over my dead body," were the last words out of his mouth. After the explosion, his mother held her dying baby in her arms. The father, once a lifegiver and now a lifetaker, then turned the gun on himself. I remembered my anguish then. A good kid, gone, for no apparent reason. I remember pleading in anger to God, "WHY?!!!" Somehow I sensed that He was with me in that anger and sorrow, pleading right along with me to the spirit of the broken man, "WHY?!!"

"I just wish I could have been there for you three," I offered, mostly believing I meant it. Later I became aware that it was not for them that I wished I could have been there. It was because I envied them and wanted to be one of them. Being the director of twelve programs made me an intimate of none. I craved the intimacy of a close cohort group. I felt it ironic that I could facilitate for others what I could not achieve for myself.

"Thanks," Mary said sincerely. "We know you care and it means a lot to us."

Her remark went beyond forgiveness, and I appreciated it. This was my second visit in about five weeks. Problems in one site or another kept me from keeping my commitment to come "one

week from Friday." It was more like "two weeks from Friday." The excitement then, and my knowledge of Chris's death, brought me back to see the team.

Now, though there was still much to celebrate, the celebration was tempered by the air of mourning that hung over the school.

"Anyway, I came to see the 'family' again," I offered, trying to change the subject and raise myself out of the gloom. Julia was quick to run with the sunshine opening.

"Oh guys," she gushed, "this is just fantastic, isn't it?" Mark and Mary smiled, as much for the way Julia's effusiveness entertained them as for their agreement that the "family" was fantastic. "Let's show him how the family has grown."

They took me up the hall to the classroom that had been converted into a store. There, sitting on the picnic table that the students had built and now used both as a floor model and break table, was Clarissa with her new, more compact body; a young black male, her brother Billy, whom I had met three weeks before; a dog that looked more like an overgrown rat; and a matronly looking woman. The dog and the woman were additions to the family since my last visit in February.

"It's kinda like walking into one of those wax museums," I joked. "Except these folks look more appealing." Because of their pillow-like bodies and faces, these characters were softer and more approachable than wax models, even though wax museum sculptures were more lifelike.

Billy was dressed to look a little like Stevie Wonder. He had sunglasses and a long ponytail of black hair. The matronly woman was dressed up, as if she were going to church, in clothes that one could find readily at a second-hand store.

"Their stories are great," Mary added. "This one," she said, laying her hand on the shoulder of the matronly looking woman, "is the aunt. She's had a hard life." She looked at me after she searched the eyes of Julia and Mark. It was as if she wondered if I "got" the inside secret. Did I understand that the students were writing about their own lives? That they were acknowledging that their lives were hard? I got it. I smiled at her with a smile that meant, "I understand." She went on.

"Her name is Harriet. Her father was an alcoholic who beat her mother. She had two sisters and a brother. One of her sisters died in suspicious circumstances. Harriet never told anyone all that she knows about what happened, but everyone figures that the sister killed herself. That sister was married to an alcoholic, too. The students figured it runs in families!"

She almost squealed when she told of that understanding. Where did it come from? Witnessing their own families? A genetic inheritance remembered?

"Harriet's sister had a child by Harriet's alcoholic father. That child is Clarissa. Harriet took Clarissa in when her mother died, about ten years ago. About six years ago, Harriet took in Billy, the son of her other sister's failed marriage.

"Harriet herself was married for a short time, but when her husband started drinking, she kicked him out. She didn't ask for alimony. She just wanted him gone. She was terrified that he'd turn out like her father and she'd turn out like her mother. Harriet didn't even date for the next seven years. Then she met Arthur, her dentist."

Mary waved an arm to the far corner of the "store" where Arthur's head and shoulders were coming into being. I was beaming. The whole group was beaming. We were like children who were privileged to know a great secret, which we shared with great enthusiasm. Mary went on.

"He was real nerdy looking and nerdy acting, but Harriet saw through his nerdiness and figured he was a good man underneath. He loved her and asked her to marry him. She said only if he would love her sisters' children and agree never to drink. He agreed in a minute because he could have no children of his own and liked the idea of having a ready-made family. He added the dog, and now they're a total family—mom, dad, a boy and a girl, and a dog."

I burst into applause. The others were obviously pleased that I was pleased, and I felt that some words of wisdom were required of me. "Their story is so full of affirmation about life and love and survival and family. I find it hard to believe the students possess the wisdom to concoct that tale."

By the time the words were out of my mouth, I wished I could pull them out of the air, stuff them back into my mouth, and spray room deodorizer where they hung. Too late.

"Can you believe what I just said?" I looked from face to face to see if they had been hurt by my remark.

"We all get so mad at the folks who continually expect the least, the worst, and the stupidest from our students; and here I am being surprised by their creativity. Forgive me for contributing to that myth."

"I know what you mean, though," offered Mary. "If they have life figured out so well, how come they make such a mess of their own lives?"

Mark jumped in. "My sister-in-law is a marriage counselor — well, a marriage and family therapist. She was telling me how hard it is to do her job and be so full of advice when her own first marriage ended in divorce."

"Yeah. I guess we all know more than we put to work in our lives. Otherwise no one would smoke or be overweight," I went on. "It reminds me of a study I read when I was doing my doctoral dissertation. They divided teachers into two groups—great and terrible—and gave them a questionnaire asking them to describe the ideal teacher/student relationship. There was virtually no difference in the groups' definitions, yet they obviously practiced teaching differently. Go figure." I felt I'd done my "consultant" thing, and I could relax again. "Still, it's a remarkable story."

They nodded their heads in agreement. Julia added an insight that still haunts me: "That's what Chris was trying to do! He was trying to blend a family out of his broken family and her broken family."

"And it killed him," Mark said.

"No, IT didn't kill him," countered Julia. "The fire killed him. He sacrificed his life for that myth, for the sake of the new family he was trying to become a part of."

Julia was *always* on the side of goodness and optimism . . . *always*. It wasn't always fun to have a different point of view in her presence. She was the only person in my life that I would call "aggressively optimistic." It was a trait I wanted to develop more of in myself. I changed the subject, but not before Mark could add a graceful and grateful, "You're right."

"How are they going to market these?" I asked.

Mary smiled and looked at her cohorts for permission. "Should we tell him, guys?" They nodded. "They did have some funny ideas for marketing—like, 'Rent a Date.'"

"Yeah. Their selling points were hysterical. 'Don't be seen in your car without a date'; 'She doesn't eat much so she won't break you if you take her to a restaurant'; 'Even though she doesn't laugh at your jokes, she doesn't fall asleep during them, either'; 'She'll always dance when you want to dance and sit when you want to sit'; 'She'll never criticize the way you dance, or dress'; 'She'll let you flirt with other girls and never get mad'." The group was taking turns telling of the selling points for 'Rent a Date,' laughing hysterically between slogans.

"You know how in some states there are express lanes on the superhighways for those who carpool?" Mark asked. "They thought of selling them as 'the carpoolers who never need a ride

home and never criticize your driving.'"

"They also thought of selling them to dentists and doctors," added Mary. "'Never have an empty waiting room' was their slogan."

"I'm impressed that none of their suggestions was pornographic," I added. There I went again.

"Us, too," said Mark, giving my low expectations generous company.

"But," concluded Julia, "they decided they couldn't sell just one to anybody, for any reason. The deal is, they go as a family or they don't go at all." Her voice trailed as she raised her eyebrows in emphasis.

"Wow," I said. The others nodded their heads in agreement.

"But . . . " continued Mary. She was the one with the "practical demand" at the outset of this phenomenon, and I guessed she was now the one who, once persuaded, could talk about the true usefulness of the project. "They really don't have to be sold." She saw my puzzled expression and continued quickly.

"They are also an academic project. Look at the writing they've generated, and the group discussion that led to this generally accepted life story."

"Oh, and the science," interrupted Julia. "Look at the skeleton over there." She pointed to a wire-and-wooden dowel skeleton lying on a table. I wouldn't have known it was a skeleton if I hadn't been told, but now I could see the backbone (made of 1" dowel rod), the leg and arm bones, and the wire joints.

"We're working on feet, too," Julia added. "We want them to be bendable and self-standing. We don't have it figured out yet, but we're going to get it. It's incredible, really," she went on. "The students are looking up skeletons in medical books and trying to figure out how we can replicate a human skeleton as the basis for this skeleton."

I was impressed.

"This skeleton idea was from one of my students," added Mark, who was no longer an outsider on this project. "From someone you'd least expect, too," Mark continued. The other two nodded in agreement and left Mark with the floor.

"Rodney took one look at the elongated Clarissa and said, 'This girl's got no bones. She needs bones to keep her from stretching.' It was amazing to see him start to cut up some dowel rods and stuff them into the middle of her body. He wired batten around the dowel rods to keep her from stretching, then wired the batten bundles together." Mark concluded his story with the look

of a proud papa telling the guys about the home run his son hit in the last game.

"We were all so scared when we saw Rodney start taking Clarissa apart. But he seemed so full of positive purpose that we didn't want to stop him," Julia said. Mark and Mary looked at me and grinned. Their thoughts were clear: "As if Julia could see anything but positive purpose in anything."

"So, Clarissa's together again, stronger than ever," Julia's voice trailed as if she had another insight. "You see, there's another lesson for the students in this: You can be stronger after you've been torn apart, if you're put back together with love."

"And you're never done," added Mary. The conversation came full circle as she concluded, "After all, the students are still working on improving this skeleton so that the dolls can stand up and be shaped."

"Whether you market these or not," I counseled, "you have to protect this idea. In my opinion, these dolls are VERY marketable. If someone else were to see them, they could copy them and start selling them. It's not so much even for the lost profit, but for the artistic claim to authorship."

"How do we go about that?" asked Julia.

"It's as complicated as trying to get a patent, or as simple as laying a claim to a name. Does the set have a name yet?" I asked.

"Yes," Mary answered, "the students call them Garbage Can Kids."

"No," corrected Julia, "Trashcan Kids."

"Oh, yeah," recollected Mary.

"Then I propose that you set up a company in that name, officially."

The students always made companies when they created a product or provided a service; it was part of the curriculum. The company names were never legal entities, however, as the products, services, and configuration of students in companies changed as often as the weather and the selling season. At first that bothered me, but later on it seemed natural that the companies and their products should ebb and flow with the markets and seasons. But I was proposing that this company not be so informally organized.

"Go to the county courthouse and get a D.B.A. (Doing Business As) in the name of the Trashcan Kids," I directed. "That, at least, substantiates your claim to authorship in this instance. Later, if you want to market them, you can. Even if you never want to market them, you have established ownership of the name."

"Great idea," bubbled Julia. "We'll do it Monday."

Mary's case was made. The Trashcan Kids did not need to be 'for sale' to be legitimate. The family was safe, and the creations continued.

Julia was not surprised by a visit from Marsha. It was the knock on the door at 2 a.m. on a school night that surprised her. Bill, Julia's husband, answered the door on that cold night in early March, about two weeks after Chris's death.

"It's for you," Bill called upstairs, with unsurprised acceptance. His life with Julia was full of accommodating her "caring crusades," which included stray dogs, injured birds, coworkers, and students.

Bill passed Julia at the bottom of the staircase. "I put a couple logs on the fire for you," he mumbled quietly as he slipped up the stairway past her. Because they heated with wood, the fire often began to die about this time of night. By 5 a.m. the cold in the house was the perfect alarm clock. Under the covers you could tolerate the cold, but once you got up, you needed either more clothes or more fire. Bill thoughtfully provided the latter.

"Marsha!" Julia said as she embraced her ragged looking visitor. "I expected to be hearing from you, dear, but not at 2 a.m. on a school night."

"Sorry," Marsha stammered. "I just had to see you." She covered her eyes as if she were blocking out a bright light above her head and burst into tears.

Julia put her arms around Marsha and slowly rocked her while she cried. "Sometimes it hurts so bad all you can do is cry," Julia empathized. That acknowledgment only made the tears pour out harder as Marsha sobbed heavily. Without saying another word, Julia held her until her crying began to subside.

When Julia felt Marsha begin to relax, she brought her over to a comfortable chair in the kitchen eating area, near the hefty iron stove that was now beginning to pour heat into the chilly room.

"I'll make some tea," Julia insisted as Marsha sat down fumbling through a ragged handful of tissues. Minutes later they sat facing each other across the oak table, sipping herb tea. Julia reached across the table to touch and hold Marsha's hand. Marsha

began to weep again.

"I don't know what's happening to me," began Marsha, enunciating slowly and with great effort so her words could be shaped and understood through her quivering lips and the halting breath of crying. "I'm always sad, and I never want to go home. I can't believe Chris is dead. I can't believe Jack is dating Liz. I don't even know if I love Jack. I don't even know what love is . . . " and she broke off again, sobbing and covering her eyes in embarrassment at showing her grief so openly. She blurted out through her sobbing, "I don't even know what LIFE is."

"Slow down, slow down, s l o w d o w n," Julia coaxed as she whispered the last words. "Don't pile up ignorance on yourself like that. Of course you don't know about all those things, and you don't know the why of so much of life. None of us has all the answers all of the time. But that's not the problem, Marsha, is it?"

Marsha looked up at her quizzically. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean let's take them one at a time." Julia caught herself and stopped short of 'telling' Marsha what was wrong. She wanted Marsha to tell her. "First of all, do your parents know where you are?"

Marsha looked askance at Julia, as if to say, "I don't check in with my parents."

"No," she admitted, "they don't."

"Then I want to call them and relieve their minds." Julia got up, went to the phone, looked in the directory for Marsha's number, dialed, and waited for the anxious answer. Five rings later an angry voice answered, "Yeah, what is it?"

"This is Julia," she began. "I'm one of Marsha's teachers."

No reply.

"She's at my house and I thought you'd be worried."

The voice on the other end softened. "Oh, yeah, yeah, thanks," the voice said sleepily. "What time is it?"

"About 2:30," Julia said apologetically.

"Do you want me to come and get her?" the voice asked.

"No, she'll be fine here for tonight, and I'll take her to school with me in the morning. I just wanted you not to be up all night worrying."

"Thanks." And after a long pause, "Is she okay?"

"Yes, I think so. I think she's just upset about Chris's death and wants someone to talk to."

"Well . . . okay," the voice stammered, as if the speaker did not know what to say next. "Okay . . . Goodnight."

"Goodnight," Julia said, gently returning the phone to its cradle.

Marsha was sitting slumped at the table, playing at sipping her tea. Julia sat down again on the other side of the table and said, "Now, talk to me."

"I don't know what to say. It's not like I loved Chris or anything," she said, wondering about the storm inside and its possible causes.

"Or anything?" asked Julia.

"Well, I loved him, but I didn't love him, if you know what I mean."

"Sure, I know what you mean," Julia offered and paused for Marsha to continue.

"I don't know, I just feel like I'm going crazy. All the things that used to make me happy don't anymore. I can't party, I can't be with my old friends, their partying and fooling around all the time makes me feel sick inside."

"Nothing seems the same, huh?" Julia offered and paused again.

"Exactly. It's like I can mark this date on the calendar and say, 'this is Marsha before, and this is Marsha after.'"

"What date is that?" Julia asked.

"The date Chris died!" she answered a bit angrily, as if Julia should have known that.

"What was it about Chris's death that makes you most upset?" Julia coaxed.

"Everything," began Marsha, "he was just such a nice guy." She started to cry again, more controlled this time. "You know, he never once tried to make a move on me." She looked up at Julia for the first time. Their eyes met and Julia nodded her head as if she knew how special it was to have a friend of the opposite sex who was not a lover.

"He cared about you," Julia offered.

"I know," Marsha put her head down again and began to weep hard, "and he's gone. What am I going to do now?"

Julia got up and went over to Marsha and touched her head, which lay on the table as she sobbed.

"You'll find other people who care about you," Julia whispered, "because now you know the difference."

Marsha was like a sponge, soaking in every touch and every word. The last words interrupted her crying.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

Julia thought through all of the things she might say. Here

was a perfect opportunity for her "find a good man" speech. It was also an opportunity to share with Marsha her supreme confidence in the holy spirit within people.

She heard a caution in her mind, too. The one about rushing in to provide answers when what someone really needs is the time and support and opportunity to find one's own answers.

"Marsha," Julia began, "how do you feel, right now?"

"Confused and sad," Marsha fired back without thinking. "And scared."

"Scared of what?" Julia asked.

"Scared of tomorrow. Scared of today. Scared of life. Scared of death. Scared of love. Scared of my own shadow. Scared of . . . shit . . . everything! I hate myself!" Marsha punched her thigh with a fist of wadded up tissues.

"Julia," Marsha looked up at her with a longing gaze, "do you believe in God?"

"Sure do."

"Then why are things so shitty? Why do guys like Chris die, and why did my mother leave us, and why did Jack leave me?"

"Don't blame everything on God, Marsha. He's a lover, not a dictator. We're all free to love or hate, do good or evil, and deal with the consequences. But, I heard something in your string of shitty events that makes me wonder something. What do Chris, your mom, and Jack have in common?"

"I don't know," Marsha said in exasperation. She liked the cuddling and the feeling of sorrow right now, and resented being pulled from that comfort by Julia's questioning.

"Think about it," Julia said. "What do they have in common? Chris, Jack, your mom."

Marsha pictured each person. Jack's blue eyes, Chris's smile, her mother's smell. As she searched in her mind a fist of grief clutched her heart. Her face screwed up as a small child's does when confronting unexpected, intense pain. "They left me. Those bastards left me!" She sobbed uncontrollably.

"That's right," Julia said, rubbing Marsha's neck and shoulders. Julia waited for the tears to subside. "What do you believe about love, then, Marsha?" It was a tough question to frame. Marsha didn't answer or look up. She shrugged. "I dunno."

Julia believed that Marsha's real problem was a belief that love was not permanent. Children need permanent love until they can develop an appropriate self-love. Without it, they grow up believing love is not possible; or if it is, it only leads to the pain of abandonment. She wanted Marsha to understand that and,

eventually, to consider other possibilities.

Julia moved around the table and once again sat across from Marsha. "I think you're at risk of believing a lie. The lie is: 'Love is temporary.' I'm afraid that's what you learned from your mother's leaving, from Jack's leaving, and from Chris's death." She waited.

"Love IS temporary," Marsha said, without feeling.

Julia waited.

"I HATE LOVE!" Marsha responded. "I HATE LOVE, I HATE MY MOTHER, I HATE JACK, and I HATE CHRIS! God, I wish I could punch something. I am so fucking mad I could just scream."

Julia saw her opening. She threw on a coat and pulled on some boots and told Marsha to do the same.

Then she led her through the chilly night into the barn and over to a stall full of hay. She said nothing until they arrived in the hay stall.

The hide of a deer was hanging above the entrance to the hay stall. Bill had nailed it there the previous December so that it would continue to dry through the winter and be supple by spring. Standing in the near corner of the hay stall was the handle to a pitchfork. Julia picked up the handle and handed it to Marsha.

"Hit it," Julia directed Marsha. Marsha heard her but didn't understand.

"What?" Marsha replied.

"I want you to take this pitch fork handle and beat on this animal skin. While you're doing that I want you to say whatever you want to say. I want you to get angry and talk to Chris, your mom, Jack, and anybody else you want."

At first Marsha complied only halfheartedly. "Harder," Julia directed. After another halfhearted whack, Julia told Marsha to "HIT IT" in a much more demanding tone. As if set off by Julia's command, Marsha swung at the hide like a baseball player swings at a fast ball.

Marsha didn't need to be coaxed any more. As the fork handle and the hide met again, Marsha's face showed true rage. "Why?" she asked with her next hit. "Why?" she screamed loudly as she swung again. Then, in a flurry of rapid hits she moved closer to the hide and began to cry, "Why did you leave me? Why did you leave me? Why, why, why . . ." Her voice and swinging trailed off as her sobbing got harder.

Marsha slumped in emotional and physical exhaustion and looked over at Julia. "Why do they all go away?"

Julia said nothing but gave Marsha a look of genuine

sympathy. Julia waited, then took Marsha in her arms and rocked her gently.

"Oh, Julia," Marsha said through the sobbing, "will there ever be anyone whose love I can count on?"

"Absolutely." Julia said with calm assurance. "Absolutely."

"How do you know?" Marsha sobbed.

"I don't know how I know," Julia replied, searching for honest words. "I believe we are born to love and be loved. Healthy people will be loved and give love. You're becoming healthy. You're finding out what you really feel and who you really are. You're suffering pain for the sake of this. You'll be rewarded by finding what you're searching for. You will find a love that doesn't leave."

Julia knew they were talking about different kinds of love. She was talking about self-love, the kind people can depend on and not be disappointed. Marsha was talking about romantic love. But it didn't need clarifying. Julia believed that self-love was coming to Marsha and when she finally got it, she would never be abandoned again.

Marsha relaxed a bit in Julia's arms, then squeezed her very tightly. "Oh, thank you, Julia!" Marsha said. "I think I believe it's possible. I think I believe it won't always be this way."

The rooster crowed. It was 4 a.m.

"Stupid rooster," Julia laughed. They walked back into the farm house, arm in arm, for a short nap before getting ready for this new day.

"You have to admit there aren't many jobs available for woodworkers." These negative words—issuing from the mouth of one of the two evaluators sent to visit me by the agency that funded Enterprise High—matched the man's disapproving voice.

"They aren't being trained to become woodworkers," I tried to clarify. "We are using the entrepreneurial process to teach them to become self-responsible human beings—to learn the natural consequences of hard work and laziness."

It would have been helpful if I could have clarified the purpose and goals of the program before these bureaucrats had "evaluated" the program. However, in keeping with the caricature of the incompetent bureaucrat, this evaluator and his colleague had

been to four Enterprise High Schools and had talked to no one. They pored over attendance records, report cards, standardized entry and exit exams, and toured the physical facilities in which the schools were housed. Then they concluded that Enterprise High was no school. After they made their decision and typed their report, they called to invite Dick and me to meet with them.

Dick was a great strategist. He had a weapon of his own to bring: Don Miller, Dean of the College of Education at Oakland University. "That ought to scare those evaluators. After all, they're just a couple of community college teachers aspiring to the higher office of assistant professor at Oakland University," reasoned Dick.

Don was the best friend an innovator could have. No one knew the business of change better. He had been with the Ford Foundation for a number of years as a consultant to schools in South America. He counseled us, coached us, led us, comforted us, and, best of all, he believed in us.

"You are tackling an enormously difficult problem," he remarked when we met in 1982. "The work you're doing is important and requires support and nurturing." Just hearing those words, spoken with a gentle New Zealand accent, was supportive and nurturing.

"Very few people will understand what you're doing, why you're doing it, or what you're accomplishing," he told me early in our relationship. Those words were prophetic. Four years later the funding agent wanted to pay for results only. Process was out. Product was in. We were being asked to show our product in concrete, measurable terms: number of students enrolled, number trained, number placed, cost per placement.

"This program has a very high cost-per-placement ratio," explained Bureaucrat A. I knew that. "Take the placement cost of the Job Club as a comparison," he went on. "That program placed 82 percent of its enrollees, at a cost per enrollee of under $1000."

"You don't really want to compare these two programs, do you?" I asked in a voice that made it clear that I was a little perturbed. "Those people don't enroll a person UNTIL he's placed, then they charge the agency $1,000. It's a scam."

"Their enrollees HAVE to go to Job Club to maintain their welfare benefits," added Snell.

"The Job Club charges every placement to the agency, and they are already being paid 100 percent of their costs through the Department of Social Services." I began to raise my voice. Don moved his forearm over to give mine a little nudge while he adjust-

ed some papers.

"I don't know if you're aware of it," Miller began, "but industrial education was never intended to provide occupational training for those who couldn't succeed in school." Dick looked at me and began to smile. He didn't know where Don was going, but we both knew it was going to be good.

"What's that got to do with this evaluation?" Bureaucrat B asked.

"On the face of it, there may seem little connection, but if you'll bear with me for a moment while we consider the important issues here, I believe you'll see the connection," Don asserted. He continued, "During the early 1900s, an educator named Urie Bronfenbrenner, an immigrant from Germany who was an educator, noticed that the same boys who were failing in the classroom seemed especially able in the mechanical world. He knew they weren't stupid, because they were so capable in life.

"Still, they had a great deal of trouble doing well in school. He reasoned that the problem had more to do with what they were being asked to learn and the way they were being asked to learn it—not the learning itself. He reasoned that it was the abstract nature of conceptual knowledge that lost these learners who were much more likely to be successful with the concrete."

The evaluators were politely listening. The dean might have a job opening someday. Don continued, "So, Bronfenbrenner developed a curriculum using tools—saws, drills, hammers, and other tools of the day—intended to teach abstract concepts through concrete lessons. The concepts of perimeter and area are so much easier to understand when they are measurable and touchable."

"I think I know where you're headed," began Evaluator A impatiently. Don proceeded as if he had not said a word.

"Today, of course, industrial education means teaching someone how to use the tools of industry, but that's not how it began. It's the same with Enterprise High. You look at it and you say cleverly, 'I know what's going on here. They're teaching people to become woodworkers, artists, cooks, and so on.' But, that's only a superficial understanding of what goes on here.

"They are teaching these people to be self-sufficient human beings, a chore that goes way beyond getting them in a room and helping them find jobs . . . meaningless, dead-end, low-paying jobs with no benefits or chance for advancement.

"This program is teaching people to believe in themselves. They are finding strengths they never knew they had, and believing that they can become people capable of making a decent living,

raising a family, and sharing in the American Dream. When they believe in themselves and their futures, then applying themselves to their studies comes next. It is a natural consequence of belief and hope. Without belief and hope there will be no aspirations, no application of self to studies, and no improvement.

"Now, that may cost a few dollars more in the short run, but it will save thousands and thousands of dollars in the long run."

When Don completed his dissertation the room was silent. Whose turn was it to talk next? I wanted to add something. I didn't get a chance before Bureaucrat A piped in with a predictable refrain.

"That all sounds very good, Dr. Miller, but how do you measure something as abstruse as 'learning to believe in yourself'?"

My turn to speak up. "That is a difficult concept to measure, but we give it a shot. Here are two changes we see and can measure. First, our students earn points at Enterprise High School. They can earn 10 points each hour they are enrolled in school. To earn those points they have to be in school working hard. An average performance earns them a seven. They must earn 70 percent of the possible points to get their credits.

"When they first arrive at school, their point record is poor. The program average is about a 5 or 6. They miss a lot of school, and when they are here they don't spend much time on task. By the time the school year is over, the point average jumps about 2 points. That means they're in school, working hard.

"Students who go to school here change. They become more productive. They're better workers when they finish the program.

"Maybe more importantly, we can PROVE that students who go to school here change their beliefs about themselves. To measure self-esteem we ask them to rate themselves on ten scales. The scales are 'happy-sad,' 'successful-unsuccessful,' 'smart-dumb,' 'able-worthless,' and so on. When they arrive we ask them to rate themselves as they were in high school. When they leave, they rate themselves as they are at Enterprise. They move from very negative to very positive self-evaluations here."

"I hate to sound unbelieving," said Evaluator B, "but I've seen your students. They're sloppy, dress like losers, use poor grammar, and their tests show they are way below average in reading and math when they start the program, and only improve to "average" scores when they leave. They have such a long way to go that I wonder if they're a good investment."

"A GOOD INVESTMENT!" screamed Dick as he rose from his chair, fists clenched. "Screw your good investment. You two make

me sick. You're like a couple of greenhorns being sent off to buy your boss a horse. Trouble is, you've never ridden a horse, you've never smelled a horse, and you've never doctored a horse. I sure as hell wouldn't give you a dime for the son of a bitch you bought to ride."

Don was outraged, too. You could tell because he was breathing slightly deeper than usual, and the veins in his neck were sticking out. He pulled at Dick's arm and got him to sit down. Dick turned sideways to his enemies and never again spoke to or looked at them. "Someone needs to think about good investments with the taxpayers' dollars. That's what Sam Levin did in 1978 when he went to the Senate's Select Committee on Education and reported that the cost of educating our uneducated would be about $1.7 billion. He also reported that over their lifetimes the cost of not educating them would be closer to $200 billion.

"Quick fixes won't make it, even if they're cheaper than the needed effort of massaging broken spirits and providing these young people with opportunities to genuinely succeed in school and life."

"We are recommending continued funding," responded Bureaucrat B, as if insulted that we were so hostile. "We are simply suggesting that the level of funding be decreased to bring the cost per placement more in line with the average cost per placement of other counties in the state."

"No one is rewarding the agency for good works," added Bureaucrat A. "The state is rewarding the counties with the lowest costs per placement. This county is missing out on bonus money that is going to other counties with lower costs. The agency wants to look better on paper."

"What are you recommending?" I asked.

"A 20 percent decrease in the agency's commitment to the program costs," Bureaucrat A answered.

"Where will we make up the 20 percent?" I asked, knowing that we *could* survive the cuts, but bleed a slow death as a result.

"You may have to cut costs," answered one evaluator.

"We'll do what we have to," I assured him. "But these cuts will affect the programs. No one can lose 20 percent of their income and not feel it."

There was no response from either side of the table. The recommendation would go forward, and the cuts would follow. What would follow that?

The invitation was printed on nice paper, but it was obviously photocopied. Still, there was something very classy about it. In the envelope addressed to "Dr. Richard Benedict, Director, Enterprise High Schools, Macomb County Educational Service Center," there was an invitation, an r.s.v.p. card and stamped envelope, and a personal note from Julia. The note read, "Rick, this was the students' idea. I can't wait to tell you all about it. Love, Julia."

The invitation read:

> The family of Clarissa Lovejoy invites you to share the celebration of her marriage to Robert Goodman on Thursday, May 21, 1986, at Enterprise High School.

The day I received the invitation, I was planning to visit an Enterprise school outside Macomb County where I was going to threaten a vocational education director with the loss of his district's license to name their program "Enterprise High School." He, like so many adult and vocational directors, was under tremendous pressure from his school board to "show a profit" in his program.

The state of Michigan paid about $3,000 for each student who had not yet graduated from high school who was enrolled full-time in school. The temptation was to enroll fifty students ($150,000) and pay two teachers $25,000 each to teach them. The $100,000 profit made the adult or vocational education director a valued asset to the district. If there was no profit, the value of that position might be questioned.

"Enterprise High" is a registered trademark. To qualify for licensing to use the name, certain conditions had to be met. For a fifty-student program, two teachers and three paraprofessionals (noncertified instructors with two years of recent occupational experience in the field in which students are enterprising) were required. Supply costs had to be kept at a minimum of $400 per student. Those, and the other program requirements, consumed about 90 percent of the revenue generated from state aid and grant money. The district that sponsored the program got about $20,000 for their administrative costs.

Every once in a while a new adult education or vocational education director would come along and salivate over the poten-

tial "profit" going to "waste" at Enterprise High School. The director would want to do without a paraprofessional or two and limit supply money to starvation levels. Then I'd have to go into that district and play diplomat. I'd tell them they could do whatever they wanted, but if they violated one of the basic principles of our program they could not call themselves an "Enterprise High."

That was sometimes a weak threat. Several programs pulled out of the network and called themselves, "Venture High" or "Entrepreneur High." Fortunately, they never survived for long because students would quit going to a school where they were valued only for the profit they could generate.

The day I received the invitation to Clarissa's wedding, I decided that I would write a letter to the district that was stretching the rules rather than visit it myself. I was at once out of my seat, in my car, and on my way to Clarissa's Enterprise High School—where something magical was happening.

It was early April. When I entered the school, I could sense a difference there. The place was crowded. And this Enterprise High was smaller than most. Although there were thirty-two students enrolled, only twenty to twenty-five were in attendance on any given day. Today, all thirty-two seemed to be in attendance and some of them had brought friends who were not going to school anywhere else.

And the place was busy. Students were working as if on a movie set. Groups of workers had spilled over into the halls where they were actively engaged in animated, work-centered conversations with one another. Some students were working on the stage layout. Others were building sets. They had pencils behind their ears and were brainstorming solutions to the 1,000 problems every parent who ever sponsored a wedding knows need to be solved.

When I walked into the store I was awed by the crowd. There were no "homo-sapiens" in the store. The crowd was of "trashcan" people—Clarissa, and Billy (her black, adopted, stepbrother); Harriet (Clarissa and Billy's aunt/stepmother); Dr. Tangletooth (Harriet's dentist-husband); and Ben (the half-dog, half-rat that passed for the family pet).

In addition to these folks, whom I had met and heard about on previous visits, there was a baby boy in a cradle; a young girl posed on a classroom chair; a preadolescent boy sitting atop a rocking horse; another young boy with blond hair wearing a superman shirt and a baseball cap; a tall, well-dressed woman (standing perfectly erect and posed!); a grandmotherly looking woman (also standing!); and a young, fully bearded man dressed as if he were headed for a

night on the prowl at a country-western bar.

I examined the crowd for a minute, then walked to Julia's room. A couple of students looked up from their work and said, "Hi, Dr. B," as I passed. I acknowledged them with a smile, a nod, and a loving punch on the upper arm. They played injured and I moved along.

Julia's room was virtually too crowded to get through. I yelled from the doorway. "Rick!" she gushed, and began wading her way over torsos, around skeletons, and through groups of artists assembling their models. When she got to the door she gave me a happy embrace and waited for my reaction.

"I'm speechless, Julia. Something very wonderful is happening here." I scanned the room. Every student was busy. There were no sitters or watchers. It appeared as if there were six more trashcan people under construction. Hanging on a rack pushed against the wall was a wardrobe not unlike one you might see in a movie studio. It contained sport coats, suits, shoes, jeans, T-shirts, and other accessories.

"They all brought the clothes from home," Julia began. "Rick, it's unbelievable. It's like all of these years we've been saying, if we do this, this, and this, they will become eager attenders and learners. We'd see it work for this one and that one but never for the whole school at once. They're even bringing their friends to school with them. You know how many students we had here one day last week? Forty! We only have thirty-six enrolled, and four of them have quit! But, last week we had forty kids here one day."

Julia was like a kid as she told me about the changes I could easily see with my own eyes.

"Finally, Mary, Mark, and I told the kids they had to have permission to bring friends and only a third of them could bring friends on any one day."

I laughed to myself. In regular high school it takes an act of God to bring a friend to school. It's different, I know. That's what made me smile inside.

"Have you seen Mary's room?"

"No, I haven't. I just got here. I waded through the halls, visited the store, met your new dolls, and came to your room."

"You haven't met them all yet," she asserted. "Go to Mary's room."

I walked across the hallway to the "academics" room where I saw another vision of idealism come to pass. I counted heads quickly. Mary greeted me with a friendly hello and a hug. She stood beside me and smiled as I surveyed the room. A team of stu-

dents was working on the wedding ceremony. Three students were working together on a "family tree" for the groom. A couple of students were working alone.

Mary took me to the bulletin board that contained the "simulation" cost matrix. Next to today's "costs of living" were the costs of living from different times in history when the previous generations of trashcan kids lived. With Enterprise High's point system, students could earn 1800 points per class in a 180-day school year at the rate of 10 per class period. They earned a credit in a class when they accumulated 70 percent of the available points—or 1260 points in this example. Students can earn one point in an hour for just showing up. To earn ten points in an hour a student must be on task with zest for virtually the entire hour. Somewhere in between points are assigned for degrees of effort. Points are also awarded when certain outcomes are met. Special business reports, investigations, and other major writing assignments result in point awards.

To make the point–accumulation process more visible and prized, points are converted, every other week, into a simulated paycheck. The more points each student accumulates, the more each point is worth. It's like earning higher pay for experience.

Students have to use this simulated pay to theoretically cover the costs of independent adult living. To discover what those costs really are, the students fill out a cost matrix together. The items that a worker's paycheck must cover are listed down one side of the ledger. These include shelter, food, clothing, transportation, leisure, savings, insurance, and so on.

Between the major categories are subcategories. Under shelter, for instance, might be listed electricity, heat, gas, trash removal, insurance, and maintenance. Transportation might include down payment, monthly payment, gas, maintenance, and insurance.

Each cost category has a range—the lowest possible cost, the highest possible cost, and two costs in between. Some students named the cheapest shelter "Slumview," the most expensive, "Lakeview," and in between "Streetview" and "Pleasantview." The important lesson was that living is expensive. A steady worker, with steady pay increases, has a good shot at a steadily improving lifestyle. Students chose a simulated lifestyle upon which to spend their paychecks, with an eye toward improving their lifestyles over time.

Mary used the lives of the trashcan kids' ancestors to generate comparisons of costs across periods of time. I noticed that the

students who were working on the groom's family tree were consulting newspapers and magazines from different time periods. One was looking at a microfilmed reprint of a newspaper from near the turn of the century. Another student was reading a *LIFE* magazine from the World War II era. In those accounts were advertisements for the $800 new car, the $2,000 new home, and the 10¢ loaf of bread. Mary challenged them to discover the cost of living that confronted each previous generation of trashcan kids.

Mary had decided that the lives of the generations would be great grist for sparking interest in research. These "people" who were being created were first given an identity. That identity was a personal history that was "outlined" as the students created a "family tree" for each trashcan person.

The family histories the students wrote were fascinating. One person was the child of immigrant parents who left Europe at the turn of the century because of the economic depression that held on after the worldwide economic depression in the late 1800s. These parents wanted freedoms and opportunities. You could almost feel the writer swelling with pride as he wrote about the wonders of this democracy.

Other characters had family trees and histories that were less socially acceptable, but nonetheless noble. An immigrant from Europe left home at age 12, never to see her mother again. She was the illegitimate child of an English sea captain who loved and left the girl's mother, who knew she was unable to provide her daughter with the opportunities available in America. So she sent her child to the New World in an act of loving sacrifice.

Those assignments and others like them were given to students who went to county libraries at night, on their own time, to look up old magazines and newspapers in the microfilm libraries. The classroom walls were plastered with timelines and family trees. The patriarchs and matriarchs of those families were alive in that school. They had come from all over America for this wedding . . . this important event that symbolized both the continuation of each family (and, therefore, all families) and the creation of a new family. It was, in the words of Kahlil Gibran, the celebration of "life's longing for itself" that was coming alive in the school.

As I stood there taking everything in, Peter walked into the room. He was disgustingly drunk. He staggered through the aisles pulling up the face of each girl he passed so that he could gaze into her eyes. He was, seemingly, looking for a special response

to his gaze.

Julia had noticed Peter cruising the hallways and entered the classroom to see if everything was okay. She knew Peter was drunk and moved toward him. She gently touched him and asked him to take a walk with her. He smiled playfully at Julia and began to walk away from her.

"He'd better not drive out of here," I suggested to Mary as we considered what to do next.

"On second thought," I jumped in, blocking Peter's path, "give me your keys. You won't be driving anywhere." I felt the confrontation in my words and knew instantly that I had made a mistake. Never push a student into a face-losing choice. They will almost always choose disaster over losing face.

"FUCK YOU," was his predictable, though unacceptable, response.

Julia came closer to us. Mark was right behind her. Julia walked over to Peter and whispered something to him. "Fuck him," Peter said. "Fuck, fuck, fuck him," and he began to laugh. It tickled him to be drunk enough to tell off one of the school's authorities.

I stood close enough to Peter to smell the odor of alcohol on his breath, and I stared into his drunk, happy eyes. I remembered the coaching I'd given other Enterprise High teachers: "If there's anything these kids are good at, it's getting you to get so furious with them that you'll do something to make yourself look like a fool. It will rob you of your real authority." I backed away. Julia and Mark each grabbed one of Peter's arms and gently walked him out of the classroom.

I heard the refrains of "fuck you" drift down the hall with Peter, Mark, and Julia. Mark drove him home and Julia drove his car.

I understand that on the way home he jumped out of the car and played "keep away" from Mark and Julia. On an emotional level I wanted him never to return to school even though, intellectually, I knew he deserved another chance. Within a year he had robbed them of money and a bit of their faith in human nature. Within two years he was in prison for killing two people while driving drunk. For now, he had brought me from my high to a sense of soberness. All was not perfectly wonderful . . . but there was something truly magical and wonderful happening in that place.

"I think the subsidy is over," I said to Dr. Lutz, superintendent of the MCESC—the Macomb County Educational Service Center. "The evaluators are recommending a 20 percent cut in the agency's contribution to the schools. That will amount to about $10,000 per site in Macomb County, or $60,000 overall. The only place that sites can take that kind of cut and survive in the short run is in their contribution to the MCESC's costs."

Four years earlier, when I leapt to Macomb County from Kalamazoo, I had done so without a safety net. My superintendent in Kalamazoo would not give me a one-year career exploration leave. "If you want to go, you'll have to quit," he said. "Even then, I'm not sure the board will let you out of your contract."

At the other end, in Macomb County, Lutz was in no position to offer me job security. It had all been a gamble. He was willing to support the gamble, but not take away the risk. My contract had an asterisk at the end of it that read, "As long as Dr. Benedict secures the revenue to pay for his salary and fringe benefits, he may continue in this contract."

That meant I had to enroll enough dropouts in these new schools to pay for the salaries of all the teachers and paraprofessionals, their fringe benefits and supplies, and the administrative costs of the school district that was sponsoring the Enterprise High School. Only then, if there was money left over, could my salary be subsidized.

I had some truly terrifying moments in the beginning. I remember the haunting doubts and fears. What if students didn't enroll in this new school? Why would they? They knew nothing of me or Enterprise High. How could I give up the security of a tenured job during the depths of the deepest economic recession I had experienced? In Macomb County, teachers were being laid off who had fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen years of experience. I had a wife, two small children, and a mortgage. Was I nuts?

During my four years in Macomb County, I not only collected enough money for the MCESC to pay me, but I had subsidized the cost of one of their secretaries, another part-time consultant, and some administrative costs. However, as the outside funding diminished, local school districts were less eager to send their administrative cost reimbursements to the MCESC to cover my salary. After

all, they could live without me now. They were up and running.

So I faced Lutz squarely and said, "I don't think it will help the MCESC's image as a helper of the local schools to tax local school districts for the privilege of having me visit there once a week. We'll be able to get about two-thirds of my salary next year, and one-third the year after that. Should I start looking for another job?"

Lutz was quick to respond. "No. You'll stay here," he assured me. "We've had two consultants retire since you started here, and we haven't replaced them. We can use the money from their salaries to fund your work with alternative education. Only, we will expect you to do things other than Enterprise High."

Lutz was a fine man, and a fan of school reform. He thought I could start all kinds of alternative schools in Macomb County. I knew I couldn't. I knew the reason people let us experiment with former dropouts was because they weren't anyone else's property. In a sense, they were the trashcan kids that schools didn't want. Try to take a student from a functioning high school for an "experimental program" and watch the fur fly. Still, my livelihood was at stake. Naturally, I agreed to give other alternatives a try.

But, my heart belonged to Enterprise High. What I really wanted was for someone to say, "What you do is so important, and these students are so important, and we believe in this program so much that we will pay you to stay here and keep it going because we know that once you leave the wolves will be at the door trying to make it into twenty-five students, one teacher, rows, lectures, tests, and emptiness. Stay here and keep it alive so that more formerly turned-off students can come to life . . . so more trashcan kids can come to feel like worthwhile human beings with reasons to hope for a happy future."

I was crossing the threshold of the beginning of my last year with Enterprise High. I could sense it, and I could grieve because of it. But I was powerless to stop it.

I was among the first guests at the wedding. The woodshop, which had formerly been a gymnasium, had been transformed once again—this time into a wedding chapel and reception hall.

The wedding stage was in the center of the room; against the

far wall. It must have cost nearly $1000 for lumber alone. It had two steps that led to what would be a pleasant deck in anyone's backyard. In fact, that's what it would be when the wedding was over. The students would more than recoup the cost.

At the center of the stage was a lattice arch large enough to cover five people—the bride and groom, matron of honor, best man, and preacher. At that time, only the matron of honor and the best man were on stage. The others would come out at just the right moment.

The respective "families" of the bride and groom stood on either side of the lattice; that is, all the members who had skeletons that enabled them to stand. The other family members and the rat-dog were seated on either side of the aisle, according to their relationship to the bride or groom.

The arch was covered with flowers. All the floral arrangements, some real and some artificial, were made by students. The student "preacher" and a group of other students stood in the corner of the room. As the guests began pouring in, the preacher became more and more nervous until he said to Julia, "I can't do it." After half an hour of cajoling and coaxing, she believed him and found a stand-in. The original preacher left the school and did not return for a week.

As I looked around the room I could see the district superintendent, the community education director, the adult education director, the special education director, and other school district dignitaries.

When Julia saw me, she rushed over to where I was standing. "Well, Rick, what do you think?" she asked.

"It looks fantastic. It also looks like the students don't know what to make of this crowd. Did you invite the governor?"

"Oh, yes. He couldn't come, but one of his representatives is here." Then she looked at me and winked, "I promised him the press would be here."

"You devil you. Well, begone with you. You're the mother of the bride and have a lot to do." She left immediately and I went to the back of the room to sample the cookies and punch. As I reached for a second cookie, my hand was slapped playfully by Mary.

"Now, now," she said, feigning reproach. "Those are for after the wedding."

Right after Mary came Marsha. She was dragging an attractive woman by the hand.

"You remember Marsha," Mary said as she made room for

Marsha to greet me. Marsha looked as if she were the one getting married. "And, this," Mary said as she opened her stance to take in the woman, "is Marsha's mother, Gwen."

Mary caught my eye with a wide-eyed signal. Somehow I knew this was supposed to be extraordinary. At that particular moment, though, I did not know that Marsha and her mother had been separated for more than ten years or that Marsha, with Julia's help, had just located her mother within the last three weeks. Marsha's mother took my extended hand with both of her hands.

"Dr. Benedict," she said in a slightly southern accent, "you are the one who started Enterprise, right?"

"Yes," I said.

"Well," she went on, tears forming in her otherwise smiling eyes, "I just wanna tell you how much I appreciate what you done for my daughter by having this school. I can't tell you what it's meant to her to be here. If they'd had a school like this when I was a kid, I'da stayed in school, I tell you. No tellin' how different my life woulda been."

I didn't know what to say. I wanted to make a joke but I knew that would demean her true feelings of gratitude, even if it relieved me of the burden of being so honored. I looked at her and knew she meant what she said. I also knew that her gratitude was for a reconnection with her lost past. Her daughter might have it better than she had. The line of life might get better for her progeny. That was enough to convert pain and despair over one's losses into healing hope. She was thankful, and she was thanking me.

"You're welcome," I said. "People helped me out when I needed it. Now it's my turn to give. I'm proud that your daughter has taken to this school the way she has. That's really because of these three, you know," and my eyes scanned the horizon for Mary, Julia, and Mark.

I turned to Marsha, trying to change the subject. "Congratulations on a great year. Are any of these yours?"

She opened her purse and took out photographs that Julia had taken of her creations. She was one of the original five who had created Clarissa and had had a hand in six or seven other kids.

"She wrote the wedding vows," said Mary, "and 'The Saga of the Trashcan Kids.' The saga is printed on the inside of the wedding program. Let's get one for you." Mary began pulling me toward the front of the room, where the ushers were now seating guests and handing out programs.

"It was nice meeting you," I said to Marsha's mother. "See

you later," I said to Marsha.

When we got out of earshot, Mary whispered to me, "You have no idea what's been going on there. Marsha has not seen her mother for more than ten years. She and Julia did some digging and found her. It's like she and her mother have this new life now. It's so exciting! I'll tell you all about it after the wedding. Now sit down and get ready." She pushed me into an aisle next to the community education director and asked an usher to give me a wedding program.

About that time the boom box began to play the traditional bridal march. Two students brought out the bride and the groom and set them on center stage. The bride was dressed in a wedding gown that had been created by several students. They got a good deal on a second- (or third-) hand dress and painstakingly let it out and took it in until it fit Clarissa as if it were custom-made for her.

The groom was not so ornately dressed. He wore a two-piece khaki suit and a bland tie.

I noticed the silence. Marsha rose and began to speak. I looked at the program and it said, "The Saga Of The Trashcan Kids."

"Today is a special day for us at Enterprise High," began Marsha, her voice cracking and quivering a bit, showing her anxiety about speaking before the group. She looked at Julia, composed herself, and began again.

"It's kind of scary talking to a crowd this big," she confessed. The confession seemed to end her nervousness. "Today is a special day for us here. About four months ago we made a doll. We were making baby dolls of nylon stuffed with cotton and we made a full-sized one for fun. Her name was Clarissa. We made a whole family of life-sized dolls. We called them 'Trashcan Kids.' We made Clarissa a boyfriend, and then made him a family. Their families are like our families—all mixed up."

The crowd laughed as they responded to her innocent humor. She continued after pausing and smiling. "We wrote about their lives and learned about the times in which they lived. Then we decided that Clarissa and her boyfriend should get married. Really, we wanted to show them off because we wouldn't sell them. We were offered from $200 to $500 for different dolls, but we just couldn't sell them. We didn't want to break up the family."

Marsha enunciated that last sentence very slowly and with feeling. She was looking at her own mother who was cheering her on with her eyes. Marsha paused for a long moment to bite her lip.

"Anyway, we were supposed to write a wedding ceremony and a story about where the trashcan kids came from. I wrote 'The Saga of the Trashcan Kids.' I guess Mary liked it. Well, here it is," and she began to read off the program. I looked inside the front cover and read along:

THE SAGA OF THE TRASHCAN KIDS

Once upon a time there was a man who collected junk. But he could see beauty in things no one else could see. And one day he was going through a junkyard and came upon a trashcan kid—a kid who appeared to be worthless—worthless to everyone else except to the man; the man who collected junk.

And the man who collected junk found others and he took them home. And he gave them his heart. And because he gave them his heart, they came to life. And because of the life they had, they began to love one another; and they even learned to love themselves.

With the love they had for themselves and one another, it was natural that two of them should marry, and publicly proclaim their love. That is why we are here today, to celebrate this love.

It is through this love that the life that is inside them will continue to bring happiness to all of the trashcan kids of the world.

There was a deep silence in the crowd. Everyone seemed to be wondering if it was appropriate to applaud at a wedding. Marsha's mother decided it was. She began to clap gently and was immediately joined by the rest of the crowd. I even rose to my feet, deeply moved by those eloquent words and their underlying wisdom. I was not alone for long. Together we all clapped and cheered for such a long time that the wedding ceremony that followed was a bit anticlimactic.

When it was over, I rushed over to Marsha. "You are a very special young lady," I told her. "I was deeply touched by your

'Saga of the Trashcan Kids.' If nothing else happens in my career, I will feel that what you said here makes all that I believe in true. I am very grateful to you for this."

Marsha looked embarrassed. She smiled politely and said, "Thank you. And thanks for starting this school."

"My pleasure," I said, and left her to the praise of others while I headed to the punch bowl to find Mary, Mark, and Julia. The community education director was standing by Julia, who was looking like something bad was happening, but I couldn't figure out what it might be. I walked over to share my praise.

"Julia, this was fantastic. I'm so proud of you and all you've done. You know, if I were to tell someone exactly how it was supposed to turn out when the staff does everything right, I'd tell them to come here and see Mark, Mary, and Julia. It's wonderful to see the effects of your caring. It's unbelievable to have the students be conscious of it and articulate it as Marsha did in that wonderful 'Saga' she wrote."

Julia seemed unaffected by my praise, which was unusual for her. I looked at her and then at the community education director. Something was causing dissonance in what should have been a happy moment. "What is it?" I asked.

"Rick," he began, "this is a tremendous program, and we wish there was something we could do to keep it running."

I felt my gut sink to my knees. "Why?" I asked, unable to say much of anything else.

"We already had an alternative education program in this district, even before Enterprise came along. Now that we're losing the special funding, we think we can join the two programs together and make both of them stronger—more academics for Enterprise, and a chance for our alternative school students to take art and shop."

I looked at him as if he had just said what he had said. Now the superintendent could do what he had wanted for some time. He could bring "that work thing" to his alternative education program. Now that there was no extra money to be made by running Enterprise, he'd can it. "Joe, Joe, Joe," I moaned, "I can't believe you buy that crap. You know that Enterprise isn't an art class or a shop class. The whole school is centered on what happens in those areas. If you turn those areas into art classes or shop classes, the program turns into a regular high school. Do you really want that?"

"It's not what I want," he said, looking in the direction of the superintendent. "Now that the grant money has dried up, there's nothing I can do."

I appreciated his candor. I had made similar concessions to

my boss. I would not judge him. I accepted his decision even if I thought his timing was incredibly bad. I looked at Julia. "Hell of a way to ruin a wedding," I said. She began to cry and fell against me. I held her for a second and told her to toughen up. "The kids are watching," I joked, trying to lift her spirits. She bounced out of my arms as if someone had erased the last five minutes from her memory banks. She was off to the other guests and out of sight in less than a minute.

"Have you told Mary and Mark yet?" I asked Joe.

"No," he said in a sad voice.

"Don't!" I pleaded. "Give them this day to relish. You can tell them tomorrow. You can bet Julia won't." I started to walk away and recognized the unfairness of my behavior. I turned back to Joe and said, "I know there's nothing you can do about it, Joe. It's not your fault. It's not anyone's fault. It's the law of mediocrity at work. At least we both got to see what could happen if . . ."

He looked at me with gratitude. "Only one more year of this," he said, "then I retire. I can hardly wait."

His retirement; my moving to "other" alternatives; and Enterprise being "absorbed" (and renamed) by the other alternative school. All of that seemed like life unfolding in uncontrollable ways. Still, this was a wedding—a time to celebrate the love that unites opposites. The love that was being celebrated today, even if it was self-conscious in public, was a love the students had developed for themselves and their own mixed-up, trashcan lives. The future could take care of the future—today would be a celebration.

XVI

Enterprise High died in that school district during the next school year. One hundred and twenty-five students marched into wood classes and shop classes during five 50-minute periods. There was a great deal of good that happened to some of those 125, because Mark, Mary, and Julia were good; but, there was no denying things were very different.

The most telling thing about those changes is what happened to the once-beloved trashcan kids. They were not sold, even though their selling could have brought financial profit to the members of the school who were responsible for their creation. They were kept together, so as not to "break up the family."

But the family did break up. Marsha and the other students who attended Enterprise High during the year of the trashcan kids graduated from high school, or took another path in life, or came back to this new, hybrid alternative school. When this new group returned, there was no "family feeling" at the school. Maybe it was because there were 125 students instead of 32, or 5 teachers for the 125 students instead of 3 for the 32, or because the activity was confined to 50-minute periods instead of two-and-a-half hour blocks.

Whatever the reason, the "feeling" was gone the next year, and nothing Julia, Mark, or Mary did could bring it back. Take, for instance, the field day they planned: a day in the park full of activities designed to help the students and teachers get better acquainted, to create that family feeling. I dropped by the park that day, at Julia's request, and saw a kind of disaffected chaos that had not been there or anywhere else in the Enterprise High network. I followed the map that led me from station to station in the park; from this activity to that. I remember the horror I felt when I crossed a bridge over a river in the park and saw one of the trashcan kids hanging by the neck from a tree that had a large branch jutting over the river. Behind that tree, in woods that were thick and uncleared, I saw another trashcan kid who had been dismembered. The dolls that would never have been sold the year before had been murdered. Besides my rage, my sickened stomach, and my sympathy for Julia, Mary, and Mark, came the question, "Why?"

I have my own speculation. Those murders and dismemberments were as much a testimony to the law of affection as the wedding and the "Saga" were the year before. If the murderers could have articulated their thoughts about the demise of the trashcan kids, they might have gone something like this:

> Once upon a time there was a family of formerly unwanted trashcan kids. They were happy together, having been collected and loved to life by a junk collector who could see their real beauty.
>
> Then one day, the zoning laws in their neighborhood made it impossible for them to live together. That broke the junk collector's heart.
>
> The junk collector could collect no more trashcan kids; could no longer care for those who saw themselves as junk. So they continued to see themselves as junk.

> Worse yet, they saw others as junk, especially other trashcan kids. So, they had to destroy the trashcan kids that loved themselves, because they were so envious of that heart . . . the heart they felt they could never acquire.

Of course, the changes that Mary, Mark, and Julia encountered didn't destroy them. They did what they had to do to adjust, then they set out to change their own lives. Julia retired from teaching to create artwork that has been celebrated and become highly successful commercially. Mary and Mark went to another Enterprise High site. Mark first, then Mary. Mary is the coordinator of that very successful school . . . one that has the backing, support, and affection of that district's superintendent. Mark runs the woodshop enterprise area, and is the one to whom every new woodshop teacher comes for wisdom and project ideas.

Marsha finished two years of community college and is successfully employed in Macomb County. She and her real mother maintain contact, as do she and her father. She is unmarried and wants to keep it that way until her career is more settled. If she could find the sponsorship—money—she would become a teacher.

There continue to be Enterprise High Schools in Michigan: three in Macomb County, one in Kalamazoo County, one in Livingston County, and one in Monroe County. There is a modified Enterprise High in the Chicago area, but it is not a school. It is a program to help immigrants and refugees get acculturated to the American way of life. Enterprise programs in East St. Louis, Illinois, and Cleveland, Ohio, were both discontinued for budgetary reasons shortly after they began.

A follow-up study of Enterprise enrollees (each of whom had already given up on school once) showed that about 70 percent graduated from high school, with about 25 percent of those graduates going on to college. Of those who didn't graduate, 70 percent were successfully employed and earning more than minimum wage. Only 10 percent of the graduates were unemployed and not in school.

I am now a high school principal in Macomb County. We do not have an Enterprise High in our district, and I am not pushing that. What I do push is the idea that teacher caring is the single most important prerequisite to student success in our schools. In and of itself, it counts primarily for the improved self-esteem of students, and improved self-esteem is the key ingredient to getting

kids to work harder and last longer in our schools.

There is also a structural effect of teacher caring. The caring teacher is always thinking of ways to improve the performance of the school and the lives of students. Caring teachers can maintain a school's continual renewal. In my new job, I try to remove the bureaucratic roadblocks to implementing caring teachers' thoughtful and loving plans for school improvement.

There is no shortage of trashcan kids in the high schools of America. I pray for them, and for the profession that is looking for more junk collectors who can "see beauty in things no one else can see" and who will "give away their hearts" so that all of the trashcan kids—the ones within us and the ones around us—can come to life.

Epilogue

Like a seed that springs to life, grows, prospers, and bears special fruit in its last season on earth, Enterprise High lived and died.

In the midst of that reality was a great happiness. The people who gave life to Enterprise High—the staff and the students—demonstrated during that last season how living things can thrive in an atmosphere of love and concern. A bunch of real-life trash-can kids came to life through love that year, because of Julia, Mark, and Mary.

The truth is, real-life trashcan kids come to life each day, every year, in every place where they meet unconditional love, empathy, and honest relationships. Great teachers everywhere have known this and practiced this since the beginning of time.

It was my privilege to have watched the tangible proof of this unfold during the 1985-86 school year. It was a saga that touched me deeply, and reminded me of a letter written nearly 2,000 years earlier by Paul of Tarsus :

> If I had the gift of being able to speak in other languages without learning them, and could speak in every language there is in all of heaven and earth, but didn't love others, I would only be making noise. If I had the gift of prophecy and knew all about what is going to happen in the future, knew everything about EVERYTHING, but didn't love others, what good would it do? Even if I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move, I would still be worth nothing at all without love. If I gave everything I have to poor people, and if I were burned alive for preaching the Gospel but didn't love others, it would be of no value whatever."
>
> 1 Corinthians 13: 1-3

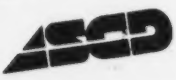
So many schools . . . so many teachers . . . so much known . . . so much eloquence in telling it. But, if it is done without love, it does no good. With love, even the icebergs that hold captive our hopes, dreams, and ambitions can begin to thaw, allowing us the freedom we all need to begin to grow.

Trashcan Kids

A uniquely personal account of an Enterprise High School in Michigan, *Trashcan Kids* describes a caring and creative approach to educating young people who are troubled, disadvantaged, or who have just found school unbearable. The author looks at why certain education programs and school cultures turn kids on or off, and at the nonschool influences that cause students to accept defeat far too early in life or to face the future with confidence and success. He shows us teachers who go beyond the curriculum to instill positive values and self-esteem in kids who need more than academic credits to progress in life.

This book is a tribute to the millions of educators who routinely make the success of all children, even the hard-to-reach, their highest priority.

Richard Benedict is Principal of L'Anse Creuse High School in Mt. Clemens, Michigan.



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